

Ioan Chintăuan, Mihaela Bolog, Florica Pop  
**A GUIDE TO THE WOODEN CHURCHES  
OF BISTRITA-NĂȘĂUD**



**SUPERGRAPH 2003**

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# **A GUIDE TO THE WOODEN CHURCHES OF BISTRITA-NĂSĂUD**

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### **Some words for a preamble.**

The gradual, yet steady, disappearance of the old wooden churches, the symbols of our communal history as well as the essential components of our identity, has precipitated a deep interest in and thorough research of these Christian worship places. In this line we have undertaken to make a presentation of the wooden churches in an area rarely, if ever, mentioned among those remarkable for their presence.

Wooden churches are believed to have existed in Northern Transylvania in every locality with a Romanian community. If we do lack the evidence for some of these settlements, still we are convinced of their existence. Could the Christian community make do without a place of worship? Indeed not!

The Romanians have been and still are Christians, and not even their serfdom under the oppressing landlords could dispute our contention. Given their impoverished condition, the Romanians built their houses and churches in wood rather than in stone, yet how exquisite the outcome... Timber was plentiful and they could practically sense it, consequently wood was used to fashion their tools, recipients, houses and churches. Theirs was a wood civilization hardly inferior to that of stone or metal, one that attested in a unique way the identity of the Romanian population in the area. Stone and metal complemented wood to the point of replacing it entirely eventually. Far too

late and ever so keenly we became aware of the loss of wood, whose main enemy in conjunction with time we had become ourselves.

Victims to the trends in construction work we favored the stone over the wooden houses and churches, which we abandoned. Instead, we could have preserved them by simply choosing to build the new next to the old. We were thus left with few traditional houses and wooden churches, for whatever we have built in stone, although durable, hardly represents us.

The wooden churches are scarce, and the number of those in use is even scarcer, although keeping them functional might have ensured their preservation. The communities that have exercised adequate ownership and maintenance soon enough will be proud, and justly so, for keeping and saving the churches from degradation. The majority are historical monuments and far too few North Transylvania localities can boast a historical monument at a time when visitors and tourists are increasingly interested in the local specific. The stone orthodox churches and the massive stone houses featuring a blending of styles attract no one. They can be seen elsewhere and are hardly characteristic for this particular area. Any community, or locality, lacking the specific traits to certify its identity can pose no interest whatsoever. The wooden churches represent us, yet we allow them to deteriorate or expect them to be restored on public funding, while we, the community, proceed with more building.

It was the public funding that helped restore the wooden churches of Sărata, Țigău, Runcu Salvei, etc.,

concomitant with the abandon only in the last decade of those in Bidiu, Șieu Sfântu, Paltineasa, Sângeorzu Nou. Twelve wooden churches of the twenty still standing in this area no longer hold Mass.

Let us also mention the removal in time of several cult objects (icons, books, etc.) from these wooden monuments and you will have the full picture of our doing; you will be overcome, as are we, by grief and sorrow.

It is the grief and sorrow that have prompted us to write about the wooden churches and present those still standing.

We thus give you in the following some data on the wooden churches of North Transylvania, and hopefully, together we can secure the preservation and perpetuation of these values, a legacy to our descendants testifying to our mutual identity.

They who made and honored the churches are no longer. They have passed into the church graveyards, under the earth that nourished them, to rest under the tombstones and crosses whose shapes have not yet ceased to impress us.

Dr. Ioan Chintăuan



## I. THE HOST LAND

### 1. The Mountainous Area

The mountains lying in the North and East cover one third of the county territory. The mountainous area, crisscrossed and partitioned by high discharge rivers, is defined by massive peaks, barren summits, ridges and steep slopes. The extended canopy, the meadows and hay-fields - home to varied fauna - also are peculiar to the area.

**THE ȚIBLEȘ MOUNTAINS.** Lying in the NW of the county, these mountains form the last subunit of the Maramureș volcanic group. Running on the NW-SW direction, they cross the Maramureș into the Bistrița Năsăud county to the Sălăuța Valley. The constituent rocks are the andesites, diorites, gabbros, all of which form knoll look-alikes ranging in height from 1250 to 1850 metres. These are basically eruptive bodies of the neck type. The maximum height is reached by Măgura Țibleșului (1842m), formed by a triplet of summits: Țibleș (1842m), Arcer (1828m), Stegior (1816m), forming the county skyline. In addition, there are more peaks hemming in the valley to the North: Arsuri, Măgura Neagră, Țigla and Păltiniș. The above mentioned eruptive element has penetrated the sedimentary layers formed by Palaeocene conglomerates, sandstone, clay and marl, forming the leveled as well as rugged surfaces of the **Munceii** (foothills) **Țibleșului** or **Obcinele Țibleșului**. These foothills are an extension of

the Țibleșului Mountains, forming the actual drainage basin running down southwards from the main Arcer-Țibleș-Bran summit. The rivers, the agents responsible for the deep fragmentation of the massive from which they flow, form a dense south oriented network (Ilișua, Zagra, Fiad, etc) where the Someșul Mare receives them as tributaries on the right. The varied morphology of these mountains is accounted for by the different reactions to weathering of their component rocks. On this substratum one encounters rich and interesting vegetation and fauna, the haven to several endangered and rare species. Also, it is the igneous element in the mountains to which we owe the emergence of sparkling mineral waters.

**THE RODNEI MOUNTAINS.** Between the Sălăuța Valley and the valley of the Someșul Mare, reaching heights of over 2000 m (Ineu-2279m) on the territory of the Bistrița-Năsăud county and stretching over a surface of 1300 km<sup>2</sup> lie the Rodnei Mountains, which form the most impressive mountainous unit in the area. Divided equally between the two neighbouring counties - Maramureș and Bistrița-Năsăud - these mountains are formed by metamorphic and sedimentary rocks (Cretaceous, Palaeocene and Miocene Inferior), penetrated to the south by magma formations (neck, dyke and sill intrusions). Due to this particular formation the massive is deeply fractured and features sharp peaks and ridges, steep slopes, leveling planes, heavy crests, saddles, glacier cirques, tarns, cascading vales, etc. Over all these towers the main ridge running on the East-West direction, with two summits standing out: Ineul (2279m) and Pietrosul Mare

(2303m). The Rodney Mountains form a horst elevated by two major faults running on the East-West direction: the Dragoș fault in the north and the Someș fault to the south. Given its position, the massive is particularly important for the study of the Mesozoic crystalline zone of the Eastern Carpathians, for it is the only massive with outcrops of the innermost formations and structures of the crystalline bedding which dips to the north under the Maramureș sedimentary basin and is covered to the south by the rocks of the Bârgău sedimentary basin and the immense plate of pyroclastic and andesite lava of the Călimani Mountains. **The crystalline** in the Rodnei Mountains is formed by catazone, mesozone and epizone rocks. The epimetamorphic rocks (chlorite schists, sericite chlorite schists, green tuff schists, different types of phyllites, meta-conglomerates, quartzite, crystalline limestone, etc) are more frequent than the mesometamorphic rocks (mica schists, gneiss, amphibolite, etc).

The following **tectonic-structure units** can be distinguished:

- The Rodna Set (the sub-Bucovina set), with the Țibău and Rebra Series:

- The Vinului Valley Set (the infra-Bucovina series), with the Cimpoiasa Series, the Suraia Series and the Breti-la Series;

- The Anieș Set (the infra-Bucovina set).

According to the nomenclature proposed by Balintoni (1997), the following litho-groups can be distinguished: Breti-la, Rebra and Rodna.

The crystalline rocks forming sets, series or litho-



groups feature varied degrees of metamorphism and are represented, at the surface, particularly by different types of schists: mica schists, crystalline limestone, amphibolite.

**The sedimentary schists** belong to the Cretaceous Superior (in the NE - on the Măriei Valley; they are represented by conglomerates, micro-conglomerates and sandstone), the Eocene (neritic facies in the North and East), the Oligocene and Miocene Inferior.

In the south sector of the crystalline in the Rodnei Mountains there is a series of acid **igneous rocks** represented by rhyolites, rhyodacites, dacites and andesites. The igneous rocks form sub-volcanic intrusions, which have moved here along the great faults running on the East-West direction accompanied by metamorphic-sedimentary contact. The eruptions date back to the post-Oligocene era.

The crystalline and sedimentary contact has engendered short subsequent valleys, large saddling (Parva-Gersa; Cormaia-Sângeorz-Băi), basins and flumes, now settled by the local population (Gersa, Parva, Rebra, Cormaia).

Quaternary glaciation can be traced in these mountains, with but little of it on the Southern peak within the county limits. One can encounter small size suspended glacier cirques with abundant meadows such as: the Gărgălăului Cauldron, the Bârsanilor Cauldron, the Mihăiesei Cauldron, the cauldrons below the Țapului peak and Izvorul Cepelor. During winter snow accumulates in these cauldrons, which then melts in the spring forming temporary water "holes" to be covered in the summer by luxurious grass. Some of the water holes stay as perma-

nent additions to the beauty of the peaks Buhăescu, Rebra Mare, Corongiș, and Galațul. Under 1800 m altitude there is a high incidence of periglacial processes: slide rock, altiplanation, solifluction, nivation hollows, etc. The highest and most important compartment in the Rodnei Mountains within the county borders is the Eastern one represented by the **Ineu summit**, an impressive pyramid shaped orographic node at an altitude of 2279 m. Several crests stem from here: Piciorul Pleșcuței to the North; the Gaja summit to the East; Piciorul Ineuț - the Roșu summit - Cobășel to the South-East; Piciorul Crăciunel to the South. Ineu constitutes an orographic nucleus surrounded by glacier cirques and valleys, cauldrons, glacier lakes (tarns or water holes). The other equally impressive orographic node - **Pietrosul Mare** (2303 m), lying central in the NW of the Rodnei Mountains on the territory of the Maramureș county is the source of more important summits, of which the south and west oriented ones penetrate the territory of the Bistrița-Năsăud county. To the south protrudes Rebra Mare (2225 m), Rebra Mica (2129 m), Buhăescu Mare (2119 m), where the ridge splits into two: to the SW - the Gropilor summit (2063m) and Bătrâna (1764 m), and to the SE - Obârșia Rebrei (2055 m), Cormaia (2033 m), etc., with little trace of glaciation but with alpine and sub-alpine vegetation aplenty. The main higher ridge of the Rodnei Mountains continues in a general eastward direction with more south oriented summits, hemmed in by the valleys of the Cormaia, the Anieșul Mic, the Anieșul Mare, the Izvorul Băilor, the Cobășel and their tributaries; all are on the territory of the Bistrița-Năsăud

county and feature deep cauldrons, steep and craggy slopes, talus cones, tarns, cascading valleys, alpine pastures with clusters of juniper and rhododendrons, etc.

**Mount Bătrâna**, situated at the western extremity of the high ridge of the Rodnei Mountains is formed by metamorphic and sedimentary rocks (Cretaceous and Palaeocene), which have given rise to a lower relief (1600-1700m). This sector is known in the specialty literature under the name of Platforma Bătrâna (Old Platform) and represents the second cycle of sedimentation in the Rodnei Mountains. The rivers streaming from here fragment it deeply and radially lending it an appearance differing from that in the high crystalline zone of the Rodnei Mountains.

**THE BÂRGĂU MOUNTAINS.** A smaller size mountainous unit that borders the county to the North-East, the Bârgău Mountains, also known as the Bârgău low mountains on grounds of their low altitude, are situated in the north between the Someșul Mare (between Ilva Mică and Șanț): Passage Strâmba in the West; the Transylvania Bistrița valley in the South and an imaginary line starting at the summit of Dalbidan, following the Buba summit and the superior courses of the Valleys of Dorna, Teșna, and Coșna in the east. They appear as a unitary ridge with four spin-offs running down to the west separated by relatively deep valleys (Ilva, Leșu, Bârgău, Tiha or Straja).

The Bârgău Mountains differ from the Rodnei Mountains in their complex relief and landscape as determined by the presence of magma intrusions (the sub-crust magma penetrating the sedimentary) and left as

positive forms of relief by the differential weathering: lower altitudes, terraced relief with leveled forms to the center, more fragmented to the south and south-east, depression basins, etc. The differences stem from their respective geological formation. In their composition we find Palaeocene and Miocene Inferior sedimentary rocks permeated by igneous rocks (intrusive magma formations), so that the best term applicable to the Bârgău Mountains would be that of sedimentary-volcanogenic mountains.

**The volcano relief** is represented by laccolith necks, pillars, apophyses and dykes (walls), in addition to the sills (volcanic rocks intercalated between layers of sedimentary rocks). The petrographic types present in the intrusive magma structures are (Ureche, I, Papp C.D., 1998): the rhyolites and dacites (Bucnitori; Sturzii); quartz andesites (Pleșii, Dl. Mol); andesites, microdiorites, diorites, (Măgura Rodnei, Măgura Arsente, Arșița, Măgura Neagră). The volcanic rocks permeating or intercalating the sedimentary, due to the differentiated erosion (selective erosion) crop at the surface forming the relief dominating the surrounding sedimentary.

The physical appearance of the Bârgău Mountains is lent by the prevailing intrusive massifs and a peculiarly volcanic relief: the **neck** (Măgura Mare, Piatra Fântânele, Miroslava or Oala, Heniu Mare, etc.). From among the typical **dykes** we can enumerate Dunga Pietri, Porcoaiete, Prislopaș, Dealul Paltinului, etc., and from among the **sills**, those lying between the Miocene Inferior sandstone at the Tihuța and Cobilița Passes (Pietriceaia or Pietricica). During the **Palaeocene** the entire region of the Bârgău

Mountains had been a sea gulf connected to that of the Maramureş, which subsequently developed into the flysch facies representing the sediments of the **shelf** zones. It displays an array of nummulitic limestones, clay and bituminous marly clays with fish (Lutetian and Priabonian) and lamellibranchiates; clays and green-grey, some red, marls, with rare intercalations of fucoidic marl limestone featuring fine micaceous sandstone to the center of the zone, brown clay marls, some bituminous, with thin menilitic intercalations, dark black dysodilic shales, fine curvicortical sandstone, massive sandstone, etc. (Oligocene), all underlaid by a crystalline platform. The Palaeocene sediments are overlaid with **Miocene Inferior** rocks represented by sandstone, clay and marl. The sedimentary rocks have allowed for the formation of a lower relief, now flat, dominated by numerous volcanic cones (the current hillocks), in reality intrusive volcanic formations which emerged later due to erosion. The volcanic relief (the "hillocks") is heavily afforested whereas the relief engendered by the sedimentary rocks is mostly covered by meadows and hayfields, interspersed with pasture crops. The streams by aspect and location reflect the geological structure of these mountains. One can encounter a divergent water network around the "hillocks" (Măgura Neagră - 1321m, Heniul Mare - 1612m, the Cornii summit - 1457m), depression basins (on the Ilva Valley: Lunca Ilvei, Ilva Mare, Măgura Ilvei; on the Leşu Valley: Leşu; on the Bârgău Valley: Tureac) formed through differentiated erosion, gorge sectors (Leşu, Poiana Ilvei), valleys with rapids (Leşu, Ierboasa, Ilva, Ivăneasa, Silhoasa, etc), etc.

The eastern portion of the Bârgău Mountains forms a structure plateau at an altitude of around 1400m, featuring slightly rugged forms which are the result of the erosion of sedimentary rocks. On account of the morphology this area was called "**The Zimbroya Plateau**" and it makes the connection with the Rodnei Mountains through the Suhard Mountains and the Călimani Mountains. Several blunt summits crop out from the "plateau": Zimbroya, Magura Calului, Magura Cornii. To the west there follows a series of volcanic massifs some of which loom at around 1200m altitude, and others at around 1000-1100m. This is the zone of the igneous-sedimentary 'low hills'. To the west there lies the sector of the **great volcanic massifs**: Heniul Mare (1621m), Muncelul (1542m), Bârgău (1362m), Miroslava or Oala (1606m), Măgurița (1582m), Tomnatec or Casariu (1580m). The altitude, the steep prolonged slopes limiting them lends them the appearance of high mountains, and distinguishes them from the massifs of similar origins lying to the east. Here, the sedimentary element is clearly subordinated to the igneous element with the relief to testify. Between the igneous massifs and the Zimbroya Plateau there lies the **low hill sector** - a surface less folded than the sector of the great massifs. The hills are formed by the sedimentary rocks and igneous mass that have permeated the sedimentary to stand out over the morphologic forms produced by the former. They look like haystacks towering at tens or even hundreds of metres above the plateau. The waters streaming from and crossing the Bârgău Mountains encountered volcanic rocks which they powerfully

drilled into gorges and passes, and sedimentary rocks which they widened into depressions. The localities are grouped inside these little beautiful depressions, but one can encounter houses dispersed up on the gentler slopes and on the mildly folded plateaus, where the woods have given way to meadows and hayfields. The volcanic-sedimentary "low hills" form a lower level relief between "the Zimbroaia Plateau" and the great volcanic massifs in the west, and stretch from the Dorna Valley in the south east the Someșul Mare in the north. "The Zimbroaia Plateau", which dominates the "low hill" zone by 200-400 m, and is in turn dominated by the crystalline heights of the Rodnei Mountains, lies between the Someșul Mare and the valleys of Teșna and Coșna, displaying the more uniform and monotonous relief typical of plateaus. Its morphology is explicable for it is a great syncline which follows a NW to SE direction, more elevated to the centre (relief inversion) and almost completely lacking in magma intrusions. The streams crisscrossing these mountains have created the favorable conditions for communication between Transylvania and Moldavia: Passages Grădinița (889m) and Tihuța (1227m) are the most important passing points in the Bârgău Mountains.

**THE CĂLIMANI MOUNTAINS.** The administrative-territorial boundaries of the Bistrița-Năsăud county accommodate the western and northwestern parts of the highest volcanic massif in Romania: the Călimani Mountains.

On the county territory the massif consists of two units: a unit of **volcanic superstructures**, formed by the association of lava and pyroclastic material (volcanic

aggregates), overlying the second unit, which is **volcanogenic-sedimentary** and constituted by alternating primary tuffs, especially explosive (cinerites) and sedimentary rocks prevailing volcanic in nature (tuffs, tuff marls). The portion within the county boundaries ends in a ridge with a string of summits: Rogina Făgetului (880m) - Poiana Tomii (1489m) - Gișa Mare (1487m) - Cofa (1589m) - Moldovanul (Moldoveanca - 1584m) - Zurzugău - Bistrișciorul (1990m) - Străcior (1963m) - Viișoara - Buba - the Valley of Izvorul Lung - the valley of Colibița - Piatra Mare - Bistrița Bârgăului. This marginal zone of the Călimani Mountains is deeply fragmented and is the layout of a well-individualized river system, tributary to the Sieu, which is in turn a tributary to the Someșul Mare. Towards the Transylvania Depression, the Călimani Mountains end in a sector of hills known as the **Călimani Piedmont**, consisting in Miocene Superior sediments (Sarmatian Inferior and Middle, Pannonian) covered by aggregates of andesite blocks, boulders and cobble, all from the Călimani. Since they are fairly young volcanic mountains now with dead craters, the Călimani are formed from different types of andesites, andesite pyroclastite and lava. Their relief has been conditioned by their complex geological development, the result of a sequence of eruptive stages in eruptive cycles with varied petrogeny, a supplement to the tectonic fragmentation and weathering.

Three **great morphologic units** can be distinguished: a **deeply crested drainage basinrelief**, which has developed within the andesite pyroclastite in the west; a **structural surface** at an altitude of 1200-1400m in the



east formed by pyroclastite and andesite lava; a **domed high central surface** consisting of lava.

The volcanic aggregates form here, in the north-west of the Călimani, an almost compact mass interrupted only by intercalations and intrusions of andesite and andesite lava. Towards the sedimentary rock complex in the Transylvania Basin these aggregates take on the steep craggy slope appearance clearly delineating the igneous limit. The valleys running through this sector have deep riverbeds caught between high vertical walls 350-450 m in height (Transylvania Bistrița, Repedea, Șoimul de Jos, Șoimul de Sus, Neagra, Scorușet, Tătarca, etc.)

The structural surface lying east of this fragmented zone is plateau-like in appearance, with an altitude of around 1500m. The massiveness and the geologic structure of these mountains explain the absence of passages and passes. Most of the massif is covered with woods.

## 2. The Hillside zone.

The hills cover two thirds of the surface of the county and circumscribe a series of depressions and depression basins formed and drained by the watercourses.

**Geologically**, the surface of the zone consists in sedimentary rocks of the **Palaeocene**, the **Miocene** and the **Quaternary**. The formations are respectively underlain by metamorphic and igneous rocks forming a structural edifice generated by the tectonic movement and particularly by the ascension of salt to the surface (diapirism). The surface of this county comprises all the three sectors

distinguished by geologists in the Transylvania Basin, in different proportions:

- *a marginal, monoclyne sector* towards the mountainous zone;
- *a sector of salt diapire*, more folded, to the interior;
- *a sector of gaseous domes*, to the centre of the Transylvania Depression.

The entire area was fragmented into compartments during the Quaternary and the Actual, so that today its morphology forms a mosaic of hills and depressions.

**The Breaza Summit**, considered by some geographers to be a mountainous unit (Morariu T., Buta Iuliu and Maier A. - 1972) on account of its altitude (974m), its substantial forests and the energetic relief (over 500m), we ourselves rather classify as a "hillside zone". Its geologic structure does not define it as a mountain.

Formed prevailingly by Miocene conglomerates, the Breaza Summit belongs only with its southern flank of its eastern compartment (the Breaza Peak - 974m) to the county. The summit is made all the more steeper by the Valea Mare and its right hand tributaries, the agents responsible for the erosion depression basins (Breaza, Buta, Strâmbu).

**The Năsăudului Hills** are also well individualized, bordered to the north by the Rodnei Mountains, by the Someșul Mare Valley to the east, by the Bistriței Hills to the south, and the Sălăuței Valley to the west. Their morphology is that of a complex of hills with a monoclyne structure which has given rise to *cuestas* and multi-layered structured surfaces. The faults affecting the Miocene sedi-

mentary components in joint action with the watercourses have fragmented these hills.

We find the highest altitude at the Măgura Peak (858m), but there are other summits also ranging in height at about 700m. Between the Năsăudului Hills and the Breaza Summit there lies a lower form of relief that runs from the Țibleș Mountains to the Valley of the Someșul Mare and is formed by almost parallel summits on a south to north direction, which hem in the Valleys of Ilișua, Zagra, Runc and the depression areas of Căian-Dumbrăvița and Zagra. The specialty literature mentions it as the **Someșan Plateau**. It consists of three subunits (Savu, Al., 1962): the Suplaiului Hills, the Breaza Depression and the Reteag Depression.

**The Suplaiului Hills** lie between the Someșul Mare to the south, the Sălăuța Valley to the east, the Ilișua valley to the west and the Țibleș Mountains to the north. Their altitude drops from the north (800m in the Bichigiu-Suplai sector) to the south (400m in the Salva-Mititei-Piatra-Căianu Mare), from the Țibleș Mountains to the valley of the Someșul Mare. The streams that cross Suplaiului Hills flowing from the Țibles Mountains have fragmented this area into vales and small depressions bordered by hilly summits whose altitudes sometimes exceed 700 m (Măgura Zagrei - 796 m). Their geology is given by the sedimentary rocks of the Miocene (Egerian + Eggenburgian + Ottnangian + Karpatian + Badenian) and the Quaternary. The remarkable thing is the absence of any Miocene Superior deposits and the presence of rocks whose ages increase in the direction of the Țibles Mountains. The intercalation of the vol-

canic tuff layers (the "Dej tuff") and the thick layers of sandstone in the existing clay, marl and sand engendered a fragmented relief.

West of the Suplaiului hills lies the **Breaza Depression**, carved in on the superior course of the river Valea Mare and the middle course of the Ilișua valley. The depression connects the Năsăudului Hills with the Lăpușului Depression and is formed by Palaeocene and Miocene deposits.

At the confluence of the Ilișua, Valea Mare and Valea Leleștilor valleys with the Someșul Mare lies the Reteag Depression, bordered to the north by the higher scarp of the superior terraces of the Someșul Mare, and breached by each of the tributary valleys. The breach of slope exposes here the "Dej tuff". The depression is covered with Quarternary and Recent deposits, the former also present on the surface terrace, where some contain Quarternary macro- and micro-fauna (the Viilor - Uriu hills).

South of the Năsăudului Hills is another area with hills less high but more compact, owing their characteristic to the parceling into flumes and depressions, the work of a ramified hydrographic system of small discharge. The area is known as the **Bistriței Hills** and is bordered in the north by the arch of the high hills of Năsăud on the left bank of the Someșul Mare between Ilva Mică and Nimigea de Sus, in the south and south west by the Șieului Valley, and to the east by the terminations of the Călimani and the Bârgău Mountains.

The summits of the Bistriței Hills mostly constituted as inter-streams delineate three depressions: Dumitra-

Tăure, Livezile-Bârgău, Budac - all of which feature tectonic-erosive genesis and extensions along the tributaries which cross them as the main contributors to their formation (the Lunga Valley - towards Târbuiu, the Aurului Valley and Roșua - towards Blăjenii de Jos, the Cușma Valley - towards Dorolea, etc.)

Geologically, the Bistriței Hills consist in Miocene and Quaternary sedimentary rocks represented by clay, conglomerates and tuffs ("Dej tuff"), salt clays, marl clays, sandstones (Middle Miocene), sands intercalated with marls and sandstone, marls, cobble (Upper Miocene), muds, sand, cobble and boulders (Quaternary). It is the west and north west sectors which feature the oldest formations of these hills - the "Dej tuff" and the "salt formation" - of the Badenian, giving way gradually south-eastwards to outcrops of younger rocks. The depressions are covered with Quaternary deposits. Between the Bistriței Hills and the Călimani Mountains there is a group of hills framed by the Budăcelului Valley to the west, and the Șieuului Valley to the south and west, known as the Călimani Piedmont. These hills of even altitude are formed by sedimentary rocks of the Sarmatian (marls, marls with sandstone and sand permeation, compact sands with sandstone and marl permeation), the Pannonian (marl, pebble, sand, tuff marls, tuffs) and the Quaternary (muds, cobble, andesite boulders, etc.)

The stretch of hills constituting the **Călimani Piedmont**, narrow at the extremities (4-5 km) and wider at the center (10-12 km), are still continuous in spite of being eroded into mildly westward sloping summits

(Dorolei Piedmont, Ghindei Piedmont, Pietrișul Piedmont, Ardanul Piedmont, Ruștiorul Piedmont) by the waters streaming down from the Călimani (Cușma, Budac, Ardan, Sebiș). The piedmonts function as inter-rivers interspersed with small depression basins with human settlements (Cușma, Sebiș).

The slopes of these hills form units devoid of terraces, affected, however, by landslides and run-offs, gullies and torrents. The summits gently slope towards the Budac Depression and the Șieului Valley, and are fragmented only by saddles which level the inter-streams with piedmont aggregates formed by cobble, andesite boulders, rolled, detached and dragged from the Călimani. This type of deposits is also present along the narrow valleys (minor riverbeds included). Between the Șieului Valley and the Dipșei Valley run the **Șieului Hills**, a high summit (691 m the Păltiniș Peak) towering at 300 m over the Șieul riverbed and the depressions lying to the northeast and east. The massiveness of this continuous ridge, only interrupted by two saddles (Herina and Posmuș), is due to the tectonics determined by the salt outcrops (diapirism - salt diapires at Sărățel, Albeștii Bistriței-Neteni and Pinticul Tecii) and the lithology of the sedimentary formations compounding it (clays, sandstones, tuffs, conglomerates, compact sands).

The two saddles slightly disturbing the continuous ridge of the Șieului Hills contain alluvial deposits supporting our claim that they represent ancient river routes which later became the Transylvania Bistrița and the Șieul, running towards the present day Transylvania

Plain, the final destination of all the streams which prior to the formation of their own riverbeds had flowed within one common valley across the Păltinişului ridge.

The northern slope of these hills is gentler towards the Şieului riverbed as compared to the southern towards the Dipşei Valley. For quite some time the hills in question were considered to be part of the Transylvania Plain, but the higher altitude (by app. 200 m), the diapire tectonics, the steep slopes and the extent of the canopy, all distinguish this particular unit from the Transylvania Plain.

**The Transylvania Plain**, so called due to the cropland extending all the way up the hilltops, is rather a hillside area with altitudes of approximately 500 m, much of which consists of steep sloping high hills. These hills are formed by sedimentary rocks of the Middle Miocene (Badenian and Sarmatian), widely folded in these "area of gaseous domes" and represented by clays and marls with sandstone and sand intercalation, compact sand and conglomerates.

The portion of the Transylvania Plain lying within the Bistriţa-Năsăud county is only its northeastern section, which is called "**The plain of the high hills of Transylvania**", bordered to the north by the valley of the Someşul Mare, by the Someş-Mureş watershed to the south, by the Teaca-Şieu drainage basin and Dipşei Valley to the east, and the Someşul Mic-Someşul Mare watershed to the west. This "hilly plain" is actually a sector of fragmented hills whose heights range between 400-600 m and are separated by valleys (some wide) where the major riverbeds feature heavy deposits and marshland (Dipşa,

Lechința, Apatiu, Beudiu, etc.) There are clear morphological differences between the different sectors of this "plain" due to the geological composition underlying the development of the hydographic network and erosion. These differences have led to the separation of the surface into several sub-units. Thus, between the Sărmașului valley (Părăul de Câmpie) in the west, the Jimborului Hills in the north, and the Lechinței valley in the east, there lie the **Sărmașului Hills**. They are lower and few of the tops exceed 500m in altitude: the Mesteacănului Hill (542 m). The hills in question are formed by sedimentary rocks of the Sarmatian, represented by marls and compact sands with sandstone intercalation. Terraces are absent, and the Quaternary deposits are only present at the foot of the slopes. Another hill compartment, somewhat higher and exceeding 500m at two different points (the Gropile peak - 576 m and the Tăul Zmeului peak - 543 m), lies between the Someșul Mare in the north, the Dipșei and the Lechinței valleys in the east, the Sărmașului Hills to the south, the Meleșului, Apatiuului and Bediuului valleys to the west. These are the **Jimborului Hills**, formed by Badenian and Sarmatian sedimentary rocks represented by salt clays, massive salt, volcanic tuff, clays, marls, compact sands, sandstone (intercalation). In the northern sector (Figa) the tectonics of the sedimentary rocks forming it is the diapire type with outcropping salt.

Most of the slopes are gentle, yet the landslides accompanied by run-offs have lent them a steep appearance towards the small discharge valleys, which have formed marshland due to the slow flows.



West of the Jimborului Hills lie the **Unguraşului Hills**, whose heights reach almost 600 m. They have steep slopes but the hills are uniform and forrested.

One should add to the abovementioned morphology - mountains, hills - the terraces of the Someşul Mare, of the Transylvania Bistriţa and the Şieu, which cover 3% of the county area and are fragmented alternating on either riverbank.

### 3. The Climate

The Bistriţa-Năsăud county has a moderate continental climate with maritime-polar and maritime-temperate influences. Of course, there are variations to this general character, with differences conditioned by the natural specificity of a region restricted in area. One can distinguish hill and mountain climates, the former pronouncedly continental.

The mean annual **temperature** can drop below  $0^{\circ}\text{C}$  in the mountainous area (at over 1900m altitude) and rise over  $8.5^{\circ}\text{C}$  in the hilly area. An all time high was recorded on August 16, 1962 at Bistriţa ( $37.6^{\circ}\text{C}$ ), and an all time low in the year 1954 at Teaca ( $-33^{\circ}\text{C}$ ). The temperature inversions, and all of the accompanying phenomena (warm air at high altitude and colder in the valleys and depressions, fog, stratified clouds, etc) are present in the colder periods of the year.

The mean annual temperature values range between  $1^{\circ}\text{C}$  in the Rodnei Mountains at altitudes of over 2100 m,  $0^{\circ}\text{C}$  in the Călimani Mountains and over  $8^{\circ}\text{C}$  in

the hillside area of the county. Evidently, there are additional types of differences due to the orientation of the slopes, the extent of the vegetation coverage, the massiveness of the relief, etc.

The general temperature gradient is of approximately  $1^{\circ}\text{C}$  at 100 m, with slight deviations in the alpine zone at over 2000 m, where values can exceed  $1.2^{\circ}\text{C}$  at 100 m.

The isotherms of the coldest month in the year (January) range between  $-8^{\circ}\text{C}$  in the higher zone of the Rodnei Mountains and  $-3.5^{\circ}\text{C}$  in the valley of the Someșul Mare, upstream of Beclean. The  $-4^{\circ}\text{C}$  isotherm approximately coincides with a 400 m isohipse. The isotherms of the year's hottest month (July) feature values ranging between  $19.3^{\circ}\text{C}$  in the Southwest of the county and  $7^{\circ}\text{C}$  in the high zones, at over 2000 m. Daytime values below  $0^{\circ}\text{C}$  first occur around October 1 in the mountainous zones (Rodna, Călimani) and disappear around April 1, resulting in 120-160 days of negative air temperature. In the hillside area, negative temperatures first occur approximately on November 10 and disappear during the 10-15 March interval, totaling thus 110-120 days of negative temperatures.

The number of hot days, with temperatures exceeding  $30^{\circ}\text{C}$  is of 0-7 in the mountainous area and 10-25 in the depressions in the south west of the county. The average number of summer days is of 50-80 and 90-130 winter days.

The Bistrița-Năsăud county is affected, generally, by the westerly winds, with changes in direction prevailingly from summer to winter, with local intensification depending on the landscape. Mountain and summer breezes are

frequent on the mountain slopes. The mean speed of the wind is 3.1 m/s, with intensification in the months of April to July.

In the lower region of the county the greatest **nebulosity** reaches 5.5-6.0 tens, and it increases with altitude to exceed 7.0 tens at over 1800m in the Rodnei and the Călimani Mountains due to the dynamic ascent of the humid air on the west-facing slopes under the air masses from the Atlantic Ocean. A maximum for the mean nebulosity is recorded in December, with a minimum in August to September.

**Rainfall** is rich in the higher mountainous region (1200 mm in the Țibleș Mountains; over 1400 mm in the Rodnei Mountains; over 1000 mm in the Bârgăului Mountains; over 1200 mm in the Călimani Mountains).

#### 4. The streams

A dense hydrographic system, with tributaries to several important rivers such as the Someșul Mare, the Șieul and the Transylvania Bistrița streaming from the mountainous zone, which is rich in rainfall, crosses this morphologic mosaic having fully contributed to its emergence.

**The Someșul Mare**, which is actually the main collector in the county, springs from the contact zone between the Rodnei and the Suhardului Mountains and is formed by the junction of the Zmăului valley and the Izvorul Păltinișului. Along its full 110 km it traverses formations varied in age and composition: metamorphic in the Rodnei Mountains, igneous, volcanogenic-sedimentary,

old sedimentary, (Palaeocene and Miocene Inferior) in the Bârgăului Mountains, and sedimentary rocks (Middle Miocene Superior and Quaternary) in the Transylvania Depression. Its main tributaries are: the Cobășel, the Izvorul Băilor, the Anieș, the Cormaia, the Rebra, which spring from the southern slope of the Rodnei Mountains; the Sălăuța, with its springs at the junction of the Țibleșului and the Rodnei Mountains; the Țibleș (Zagra), the Ilișua and the Valea Mare, in the Țibleș Mountains; the Ilva and the Leșu in the Bârgăului Mountains; the Transylvania Bistrița, the Budacul and the Șieul, in the Călimani Mountains; the Dipșa with the Lechința and the Meleșul with the Apatiu in the Transylvania Plain.

The hydrographic network is denser in the mountainous area ( $1.2 \text{ km/km}^2$ ) and much slighter in the South ( $0.35 \text{ km/km}^2$ ), on the Dipșei and the Ludușului Valleys drainage basin. In fact, the streams are semi-permanent due to reduced rainfall, marked evaporation and reduced subterranean contribution. The streams are mainly supplied by rainfall and snowfall; the subterranean contribution is modest. The main water contributors to the Someșul Mare, the principal collector, are the tributaries flowing from the mountainous zone. In what concerns the seasonal discharge, the spring discharge is dominant due to the melting snow and the relatively abundant seasonal rainfall. Minimal discharges are recorded in the summer and winter, mainly due to reduced subterranean water supplies (winter) and rainfall, high evaporation and slackening subterranean supplies (summer). Maximal **discharges** have different causes and occur at different times

of the year. Flooding was recorded in 1888; April 1913; 4-7 April 1932; 16-19 February 1958; 29 March - 4 April 1964; 12-14 May 1970, etc.

Winter phenomena on the county rivers take the form of ice on the riverbanks, torrents, and ice bridges.

The county rivers carry high quantities of **alluvium**, depending on their lithology, morphostructure and the extent of vegetation on the surfaces where they collect their waters. The specific alluvium flow is higher in the Southwest of the county (0.5 t/ha/year), where there are friable sedimentary rocks, and lower in the mountainous areas, at over 1200 m in altitude, on the southern slope of the Rodnei and the Țibleșului Mountains and the western slope of the Bârgăului and the Călimani Mountains. Due to erosion, rivers drag on average a high quantity of alluvium. Thus, at Nepos the Someșul Mare drags approximately 153,000 t per year and reaches approximately 900,000 t at the county boundary.

From the **hydro-chemical** perspective the rivers on the county territory fall in the category of carbonated waters (the rivers in the mountainous areas, with metamorphic and igneous rocks) and mixed waters (the waters in the sedimentary rock formation, especially in the "diapire area"). The former contain a significant amount of good quality water of insignificant impurity.

The Bistrița-Năsăud county holds an average multi-annual water volume of 1.8 billion m<sup>3</sup>. A significant amount of the volume is good quality water, especially in the mountainous areas, where there are no mineral accumulations in the substratum liable to alter the water composition

and quality and few pollution sources out in the open. The water of the streams can be used both for producing electricity and for the population's water supplies, as well as in industry and agriculture. The breakthrough was made by the hydro-technical works at Cobilița on the Transylvania Bistrita, the regularization works on the Someșul Mare, the Șieul, etc, with progress made even as we write.

Bistrița-Năsăud county displays rich subterranean water deposits due to its complex geological composition and diverse relief. Especially important from an economic point of view are the varied types of mineral water (different types of salty mineral, sulphurous, sparkling mineral, and carbonated waters), which have a long history of medical and alimentation (the salty waters) utility.

There are in the county 37 sources of salty water, 3 sources of sulphurous waters and 76 sources of sparkling and carbonated waters.

## 5. The soil

The geographic altitude-type zone, the lithology and humidity have determined the emergence of both zonal and a-zonal soil. Thus, in the mountainous area the zonal soils are present: humicosiliceous, humicoferriluvial, ferriluvial, podzol (brown ludic and brown acid); black acid, yellow-brown sylvan; sylvan podzol (brown and yellow brown), and a-zonal soils: eroded rego-soils; highly levigated humus; alluvial soil; peat soils.

Around the higher peaks in the Rodnei Mountains (Ineu, Rebra) there are patches of humicosiliceous soils, of

alpine pastures and of transition to humicoferriluvial soil formed by crystalline rocks rich in quartz. On the higher drainage basin between the Anieș, the Cormaia, and the Rebra rivers and on the main ridge of the Rodnei Mountains there also occur the humicoferriluvial soil and podzol, which are defined by low permeability.

In the mountains, on larger surfaces, up to the inferior limit of 1100 m there are brown acid soils and brown podzol. There is a high occurrence of such soils in the superior basin of the Ilva, the Anieș, the Rebra and the Gersa, on the steep slopes, where the rock alteration and weathering have produced run-offs. The local vegetation is represented by common spruce and deciduous woods, by juniper and such plants as are specific to the barren alpine land.

The brown-yellowish and brown-acid forest soils stretch under the 1000 m izohipse. They have reduced permeability due to the shale component. The hills on the right of the Someșul Mare are covered by brown and brown-yellowish podzol with low permeability and a low capacity for water retain. Nevertheless, they have facilitated the development of forests. In the Dumitra-Tăure depression, in the Bistrița area, on the hill-slopes on the right bank of the Șieu, between Șieu and Domnești, on the superior basin of the Dipșa and the Meleșu, etc, occur especially brown and yellowish brown sylvan soils overlaying the shale, sandstone, marl and tuff layers. They have poor permeability and the scarcity of vegetation has favored erosion phenomena.

The sylvan podzol, formed on friable and, thus, per-

meable sedimentary rocks, covers limited surfaces in the Șieut and the Reteag areas, on the western slope of the Someșul Mare, between Nimigea de Jos and Braniște, etc.

The eroded rego-soils have a higher incidence in the southern part of the county, particularly in the basins of the Dipșa and the Meleș rivers. The alluvium soils are present on the meadows of the main rivers, while on the banks of the rivers in the Transylvania Plain there is marshland with low permeability causing water-logging and swamping (Brăteni, Lechința, etc.). The salty areas are the manifestation of saline phenomena (Mogoșeni, Săsarm, Caila, Blăjenii de Jos, Albeștii Bistriței, Cepari, Mintiu).

## 6. The Vegetation

The spontaneous vegetation consists of associations displayed on altitudinal strips which form terraces and sub-terraces of woodland and grassy vegetation. The flora in the county includes approximately 2.150 species of superior plants, whereas the inferior plants are estimated at approximately 10.000 species.

**The alpine level** (over 2.100m), only present in the Rodnei Mountains, displays alpine pastures with hayfields and clusters of juniper (*Pinus mugo*), (*Juniperus communis* ssp. *Nana*) and rhododendron (*Rhodendron myrtifolium*). Bushes, stony stubble and sub-alpine pastures, at an altitude between 1500 and 2100 m, can be encountered in the Rodnei, the Țibleș and the Călimani Mountains. This is the **sub-alpine level**, where among the blueberry, red bilberry, and juniper clusters one can encounter such rare plant



species as are endemic to the Carpathians or singularly endemic to any one massif.

**The mountain level**, which follows between 1500 and 500 m, correlates with the forest zone with three distinct sub-terraces: **the lower mountainous** (650-800m) - with hornbeam (*Caprinus betuls*), beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), common oak (*Quercus petraea*) wood and meadows, pastures and hayfields, in addition to the pasture crops; **the middle mountainous** (800-1100 m), with beech, beech and common spruce, and hayfields, pastures and pasture crops; **the upper mountainous** (1100 - 1500 m), with common spruce, clusters of blue berry and bilberry, meadows with hayfields and pastures.

**The hills** are covered with beech, hornbeam and common oak, surrounded by hayfields, pastures and farmland. In the **depressions** one encounters pasture crops, hayfields and pastures around the localities. The river **meadows** are covered with pasture crops, marshland and morass. The vegetation is conditioned by the nature of the substratum and the microclimate, both of which can alter randomly the composition of the vegetal associations.

The flora of the Bistrița-Năsăud county contains relict, endemic, rare and endangered species. 44 plant species are protected as natural monuments, as are the 28 natural reserves, the 6 historical gardens, the 2 dendrological parks and the 2 national parks.

## 7. The Wildlife

The fauna, in general, is directly connected with the vegetation zones, however, it is continually on the

move, most times beyond the county boundaries, even while the habitat itself is changing. Numerous invertebrates (particularly the insects) and vertebrates inhabit the county area, many of which, however, have disappeared, while others are endangered. Every fauna group includes rare and endangered species, some protected as natural monuments (butterfly species, the red ant, the fresh water turtle, the raven, the eagle, the stork, the black goat, the lynx, etc.) In the case of some animals, the number of species is unknown, but not where the fish, batrachians, reptiles, birds and mammals are concerned. The mammals, particularly those hunted, have had much to suffer. The number of some of these species is dwindling, others have recorded fluctuation in number, and still others change habitats due to the human presence.

The water fauna, rich and diverse decades ago, has dwindled alarmingly both as species and as individuals due to the pollution produced by the brandy cauldrons and sawmills. The streams in the hillside villages are stifled by the residue caused by the production of fruit brandy, and by the sawdust from the sawmills, especially in the mountain area, where such activities are on the increase.

The trophies and the different naturalized species collected from this territory, today only on museum display in museums and in private collections, testify to a past abundance.

## II. THE WAYS TO THE CHURCHES

### 1. A few words

The roads leading to the wooden churches in North Transylvania do not simply exist but rather guide us through the valleys of the Someșul Mare to Gersa I and Sângeorz Băi, through the valley of the Runcu to Runcu Salvei, the valley of the Zagra to Zagra and Suplai, the valley of the Dobricel to Dobricel, the valley of the Dumbrăvița to Păltineasa, the valley of the Transylvanian Bistrița to Dumbrava, the valley of the Budăcel to Pietriș and through the Transylvania Plain to Sângeorzul Nou, Bungard, Sălcuța, Strugureni, Apatiu, Bidiu. Let us add to the above the wooden churches at Pietriș, Dumbrava, Sărata and Țigău in the neighbourhood of the city of Bistrița.

Their spatial distribution, their presence in all of the morphologic units and subunits of North Transylvania supports our claim that indeed there have been wooden churches, be they small or large, in all of the villages with Orthodox or Greek-Catholic Romanian locals.

The presence of churches in the sub-mountainous zone, in the hilly area or the "Plain" of Transylvania, has no connection with the physical nature of the place but rather with the locals', or, better put, the Romanians' faith. Churches were fashioned in wood even where stone was available. This was a deliberate option on the part of the Romanian, for their budgets were incomparably tighter than those of the Transylvanian Hungarians and Saxons.

The Hungarian locals possessed castles, homes and churches made of stone. If ever their churches or houses in the respective villages displayed wooden roofs, that was a positive sign of communal poverty, yet might as well have been the mark of great love for and artistry in wood, both of which endured over the ages. By contrast, the Saxons' were exclusively stone churches even where the locality was small or quite remote from any quarry.

By and large, the church through its dimensions, architecture and location was a token of power and wealth, and at the time in this land the Romanians were not the ones rich and powerful. It was long before the Romanians were permitted to build stone churches. Theirs were tiny wooden churches even in the villages with exclusively Romanian population. The Saxons' were and still are impressive by size and architecture. Today, the presence of these monuments in small localities such as Herina, Tărbăș, etc., is hard to understand. Yet, one should keep in mind that they fulfilled several functions, and long after building them, they who erected them were still feeling strangers to the land.

The past and present existence of the wooden churches on the territory of North Transylvania testifies to their Romanian peculiarity in all of Transylvania and not only. Indeed there are differences in their architecture and size, etc., which, however, are not accountable to their geographical position within Transylvania. The Northern Transylvania wooden churches constitute an argument in favour of our contention. There are differences within the territory itself, but the differences are due to the

natural conditions, variable with every zone, as well as to historical developments, which have not been identical everywhere. The historical developments were determinant both in their emergence and location as well as in their characteristics. The emergence of the wooden churches is motivated by history, as are the churches' dimensions, architectures and locations.

Thus, in the high hilly sub-mountainous zone, on the narrow valley of the Gersa, at **Gersa I**, the roof of the church comprises two components differing in size: the one is low, above the altar, the other is high, over the pronaos and the naos. The tower/steeple is very narrow and tall (arrow shaped) and starts from the roof of the belfry. This church is made unique by the tall slender steeple that seems to start from the top of a miniature wooden house all with porch and wooden pillars (which is really the belfry). Its roof formed by two high angled compartments, its position and the form of its steeple, all make the wooden church at Gersa I singular.

Two compartments/portions (one over the pronaos and the naos, and the other over the altar) form too the roof of the wooden church of **Runcu Salvei**, which, however, is less high and sharp-angled. The tower has a normal position and starting point that sets it off from the one at Gersa, which is located on the corner of the roof and starts from a elevated stand. The tower dimensions are not large compared with those of the tower of the wooden church at Gersa, which is in the shape of a high cylinder.

Also in the high hilly sub-mountainous zone, at **Suplai**, there is a wooden church with a two-compartment

roof. The difference is that it is plastered and it has a stone belfry tower and a shingle roof. The wooden church at **Păltineasa**, which is highly deteriorated, is plastered, and the tower has a farmhouse type square basis and a short helmet.

In the high hill zone at the foot of the Țibleș and the Rodnei Mountains, towards the Someșul Mare valley, there are seven wooden churches: Sângeorz Băi, Gersa I, Runcu Salvei, Zagra, Suplai, Dobricel, Păltineasa, all displaying different architectures. Three of them - Gersa, Runcu Salvei and Suplai - have two-compartment roofs: one low over the altar, the other, high over the naos and the pronaos; two of them - Suplai and Păltineasa - are plastered; one - Suplai - has a stone tower.

The basis of the tower at the wooden churches with towers in the area is square but it comes in different sizes and forms. On top of it lies the square or octagonal shingle roof from the middle of which starts the steeple (tower). The space beneath the tower harbors the bells, and all together form the belfry.

In the case of the wooden churches without a tower at Silivașu de Câmpie - Village and Fânațe - the belfry is separated from the church. The belfry does join the body of the church but is a quite separate special construction beside the church.

These churches have porches on the entrance side, which can also be encountered at the wooden church of Sărata and others. Covered entrance halls are displayed by the wooden churches at Burdulenii and Dumbrava, which, however, are late additions.

At some of the historical monument wooden

churches the shingle on the roof has been replaced by tin or other material, thus altering the appearance of the monument. This is the case at Apatiu and Strugureni. At Silivașu de Câmpie - Fânațe, the church is covered with tile and the belfry with tin.

Some of the wooden churches have suffered alterations to the structure and design during relocation or capital repairs. The most profound changes occurred in the case of the wooden churches at Suplai (the tower and the entrance), Burduleni (the entrance), Strugureni (the tower, beams and joints), Bungard (the store rooms next to the pronaos, both under the same tower roof).

All the abovementioned alterations which have modified the churches and, moreover, lessened their value, can be attributed to the priests and rectors who, uninspired and eager to have a functional worship place for the community, have accepted inadequate solutions and exaggerated compromises at times. They had the interior walls and the painted canvas pulled down and the original painting of the woodwork plastered over; they even had the exteriors plastered (Suplai, Dumbrava, Păltineasa). In some churches they substituted doubtful iconostases for the old valuable ones. Likewise, they replaced the painted canvas with lithographic icons. Despite the changes undergone by some of the wooden churches these worship places do constitute an assembly of great historical and cultural value, including those that now have lost some of their physical integrity.

Our proposition is that we approach them alphabetically rather than follow their typology or geography. Let us postpone their classification for when we have

been thoroughly acquainted with them. The classification will then be all the more facile to understand and accept.

## 2. The Wooden Churches

### APATIU (the village of Chiochiș)

**Location and access:** The wooden church is in the village of Apatiu on the valley of the Apatiu, the left tributary to the Meleș, which flows into the Someșul Mare at Beclean. From Beclean one should follow the asphalted 172A county road to Apatiu. Apatiu can be reached also by way of Lechința - Matei - Strugureni.

**Patron saint:** Archangels Michael and Gabriel.

**Year of construction:** 1740? According to a document recording the existence of a church in the area.

**Repairs (restoration):** the first renovation (restoration?) of the paintwork is conducted in 1791; the second, in 1962; it is then that the windows were enlarged and the interior plastered; the church is covered with corrugated plastic.

**Current condition:** the plan has been preserved that is peculiar to 18th century buildings.

- the pronaos with a south entrance;
- the wall between the pronaos and the naos has been segmented only on the left side;
- over the pronaos stands the small size tower transformed;
- the apse apsis is unhooked and consists of three sides;
- the icons have been repainted.

**Decoration:** the doorframe to the altar displays geometrical



motifs; geometrical motifs are also carved on the main doorframe;

- fragments of painting on the naos vault.

This is the only church in the village and it holds

Mass.



The wooden church at Apatiu



The decorations on the doorframe of the entrance door to the church at Apatiu



The shutter to one of the windows of the wooden church at Apatiu

## BISTRIȚA

**Location and access:** The wooden church is in the park of the Museum Complex of Bistrița-Năsăud, at No.19, General Grigore Bălan Street.

**Patron Saint:** Saint Apostles Peter and Paul.

**Year of construction:** first half of the 17th century;  
 - sold to the villagers of Chiuesti in the 19th century, who donated it in 1894 to the congregation of Leurda;  
 - in 1998 the county Museum of Bistrița-Năsăud purchased it from the Leurda village and relocated it in the Museum Complex park.

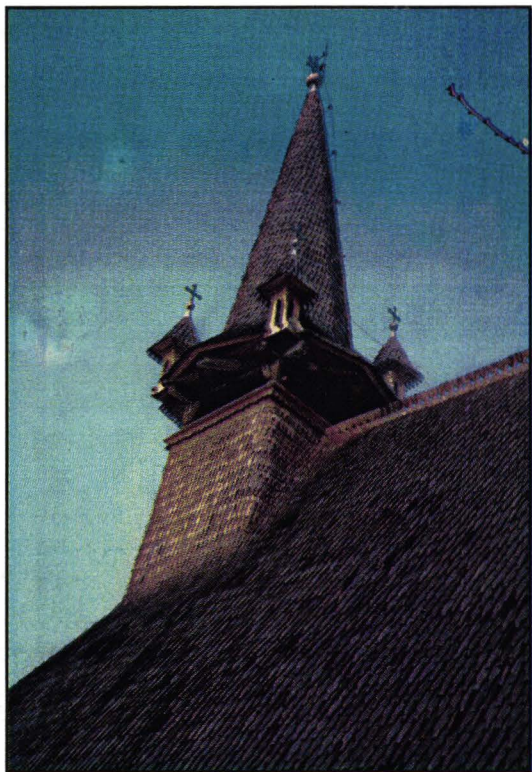




Bistrița - the wooden church in the park of  
the Bistrița-Năsăud Museum Complex



Bistrița - Joints at the apse apsis of the wooden church  
at the Bistrița Museum



The tower of the "Saint Apostles Peter and Paul's" wooden church brought from Leurda (CJ) to the Bistrița-Năsăud Museum Complex

**Current condition:** pronaos, naos, octagonal altar;

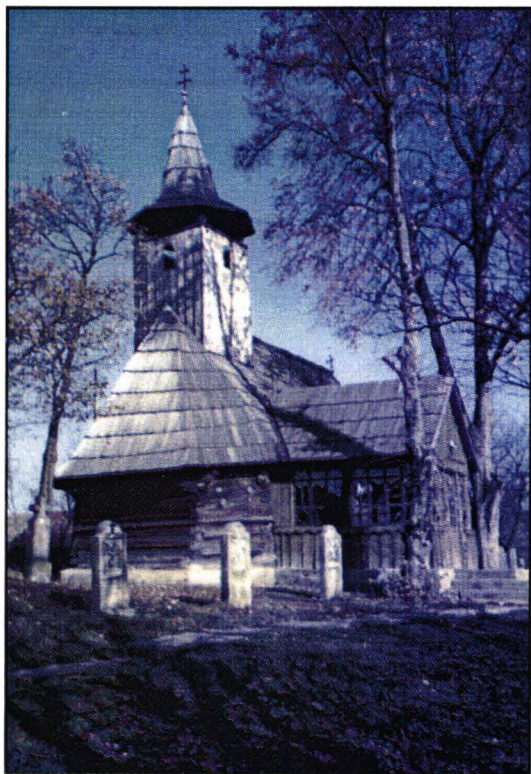
- south entrance;
- interior decoration by the painters of Nicula in the 18th century; fixed and prepared for restoration.

**Preserved:** scenes painted in the naos and the altar; the Deacon and the Emperor Doors (18th century) belong now to the Collection of the Transylvania History Museum in Cluj, by which they were purchased decades ago.

In the year 1926 the church was abandoned by the villagers and replaced by a larger one brought from Rohia. Left to degradation, it quickly advanced towards total ruin. It has been saved through relocation. The village of Leurda is in the county of Cluj, at the boundary with Bistrița-Năsăud county (across the hills from Ciceu Corabia and Dumbrăveni). There is no motor access, there is a small, if dwindling, number of inhabitants in the village and the community cannot afford the maintenance of two churches. At the time of acquisition, the wooden church was partially in ruins.

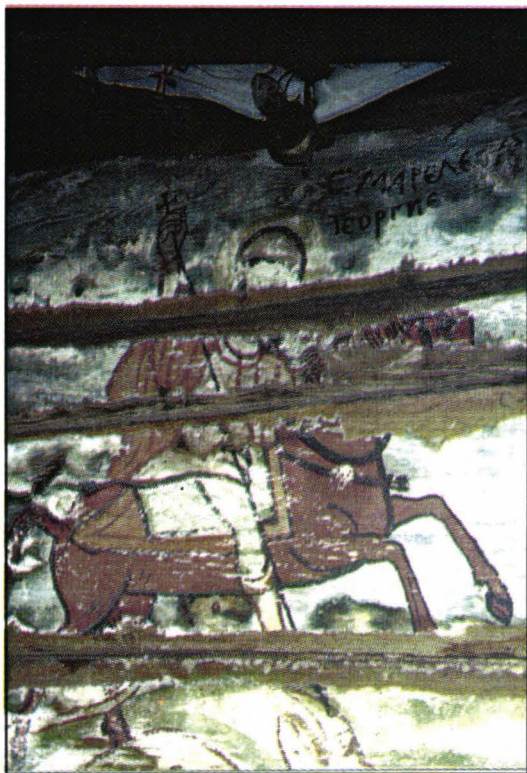
## **BURDULENI (the village of Teaca)**

**Location and access:** The Burdulenii village lies on the left tributary of the Archiud (left tributary of the Dipșa Valley, which is in turn the left tributary to the valley of the Șieu) and can be reached by taking DN17 (National Road) from Bistrița to Sărățel, and from here on to DN 15A to the Viile Tecii, where you divert to the country road leading to Budurleni. On the same DN 15A motorway one can get to Viile Tecii from the direction of Reghin or Târgu Mureș.



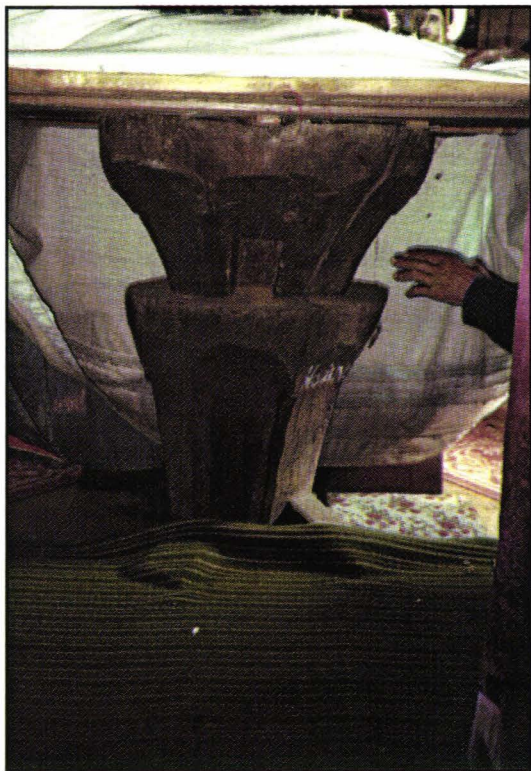
Budurleni - the wooden church





Saint George - The wooden church  
at Budurleni





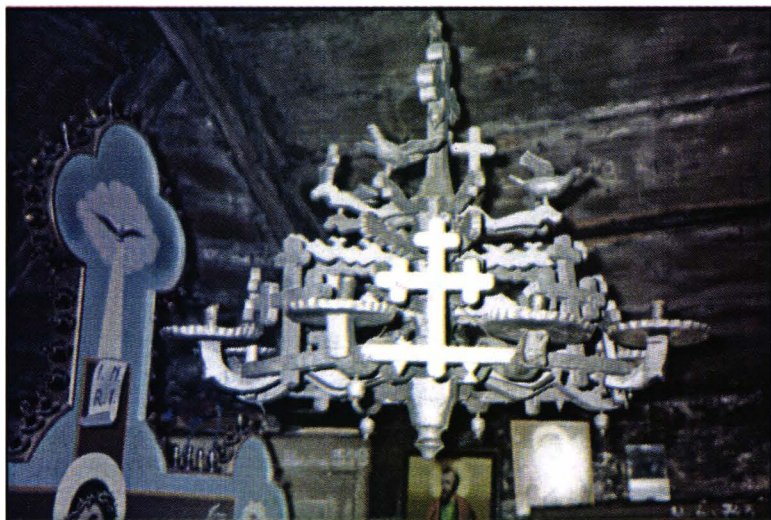
The foot of the Communion table  
(wood) in the altar of the wooden  
church at Budurleni



The foot of the Communion table, dated 1705 -  
the wooden church at Budurleni



Wooden chandelier - the wooden church at Budurleni



Wooden chandelier the wooden church at Budurleni

**Patron Saint:** Birth of the Holy Virgin.

**Year of construction:** 1705 - as recorded by the engraving on the altar.

**Repairs:** In 1925 the door between the naos and pronaos was altered (enlarged).

- over the naos a new tower was added on a square base with a small size helmet.

**Current condition:** five-sided pronaos, naos, five-sided apse apsis;

- the entrance door is on the south wall;

**Decoration:** cable rope belt, entrance rosette and graded consoles where the altar sides join;

- the church was painted in the year 1768 by 2 painters, but the subsequent repairs of 1925 destroyed the paint work;

- a few fragments of painting have been preserved in the pronaos: St. John, St. Elijah, Holy Virgin; the Passion of Jesus in the naos; a few glass icons from the 18th century, a glass icon from the 19th century and two chandeliers with birds.

Holds Mass.

### **BUNGARD (the village of Lechința)**

**Location and access:** From Bistrița, the DN17 to Sărățel, and from here by DN15A to Herina, where by 172E county road you arrive at Lechința and from here by road 151 on to Sângeorzu Nou, where there is a country road leading to Bungard (3 km). The church is on the hill at the northern edge of the village.

**Saint Patron:** Archangels Michael and Gabriel.

**Year of construction:** 1711, according to the engraving on the exterior beam on the southern side. It served as a monastery (the monastery church?) until the year 1760 when it was moved in the village.

**Repairs:** In 1950 the tower destroyed by a storm was rebuilt; covered with shingle; shed added next to the pronaos.

**Current condition:** rectangular plastered pronaos, with a platform added;

- in the naos the lateral walls are plastered, the vault is covered with paintings representing the Miracles and Passion of Jesus;
- five-sided altar with unhooked apse;



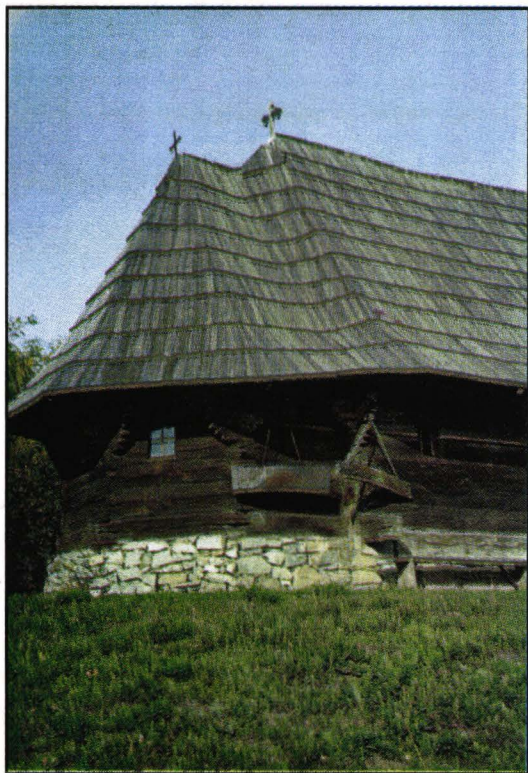


The wooden church at Bungard

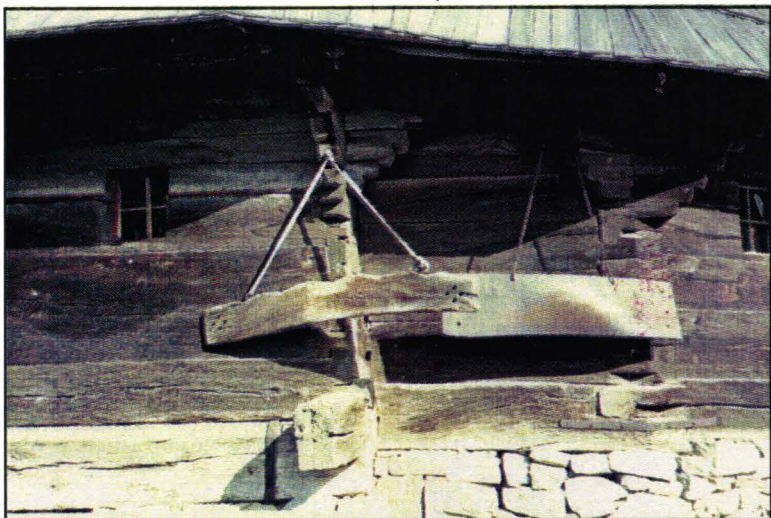
- the mural assembly dates back to the second half of the 18th century;
- the painted scenes are accompanied by inscriptions in Cyrillic;
- the entrance door, the arcades which divide the vaults of the naos, the doors of the iconostasis are richly decorated with the rope and sun motifs, with the wooden button, the rhombus and the denticle patterns, etc.

**Preserved:** several wooden icons: Archangel Michael, Holy Virgin with the infant, Jesus Pantocrator, - 18th century.

Holds Mass.



Bungard - the apse of the church -  
exterior

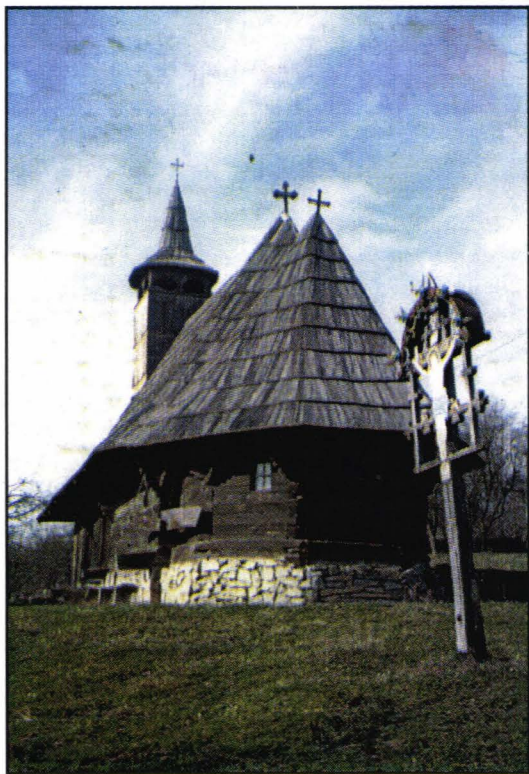


The wooden and the metal vesper bells -  
the wooden church at Bungard



"Dovetail joints" at the apse apsis -  
the wooden church at Bungard



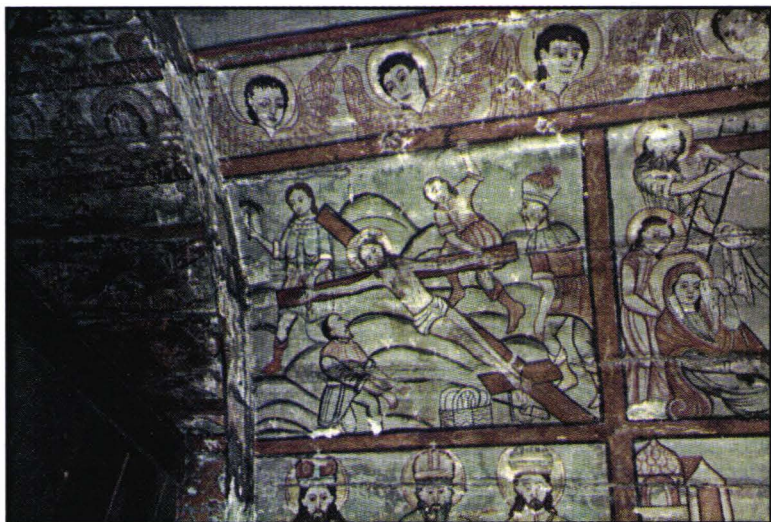


Bungard  
the wooden church and the crucifixion





The Emperor Doors -  
the wooden church at Bungard



Christ's Passion  
the wooden church at Bungard



Christ's Passion  
the wooden church at Bungard





Christ's Passion  
the wooden church at Bungard



Christ's Passion  
the wooden church at Bungard



Christ's Passion  
the wooden church at Bungard



Saint George - painting in the naos  
the wooden church at Bungard

## DOBRICEL (the village of Căianu Mic)

**Location and access:** On DN17 heading towards Dej or Bistrița at Uriu follow the county road 171 (paved) to Dobric, where the country road (unpaved) takes you to Dobricel.

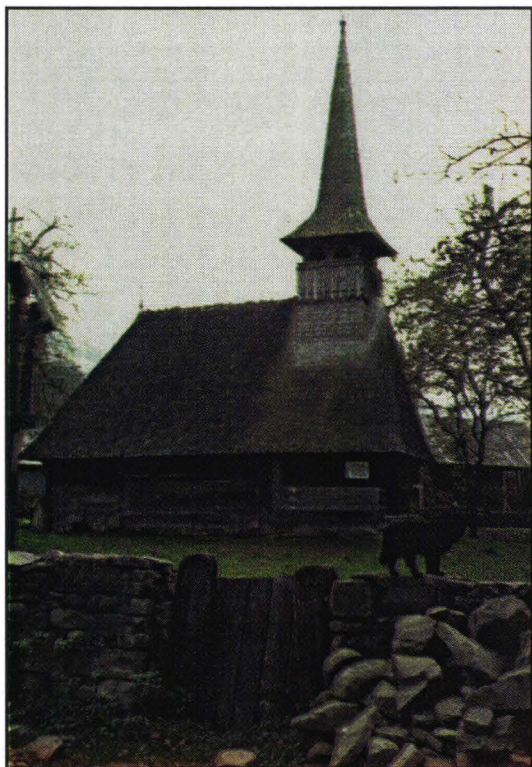
**Patron Saint:** Archangels Michael and Gabriel.

**Year of Construction:** 1744, according to the engraving on the door between the naos and the pronaos.

**Restoration:** the church was restored by the Direction of the Historical Monuments in 1980.

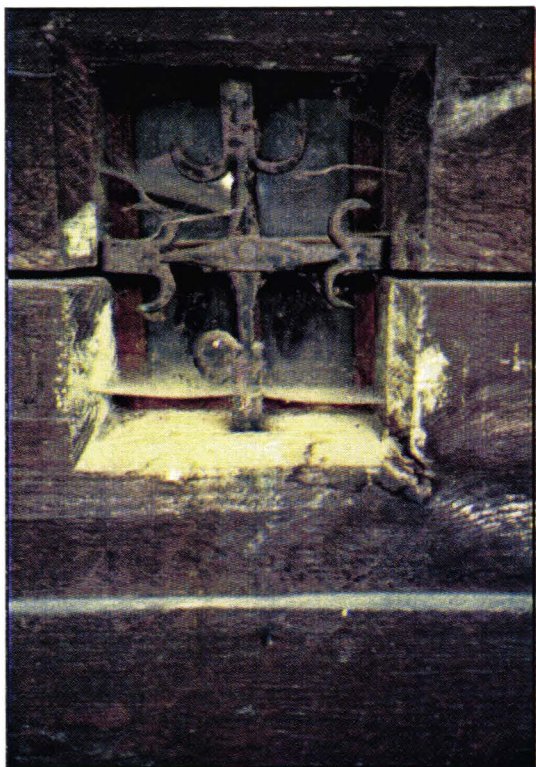
**Current condition:** the plastered pronaos has an entrance on the south side;





Dobricel - the wooden church

- the tower stands over the pronaos on a square base and ends in a tall helmet;
- the naos and the altar have a semi-cylindrical vault;
- three-sided altar with an unhooked apsis;
- the shingle roof as a whole stands on two pillars on the corners of the apse apsis which form two little porches.



Ironwork at one of the  
church windows at Dobricel

**Preserved:** - several fragments of canvas with the paint-work;

- the old shape iconostasis with 2 access doors to the altar;
- wooden icons, glass icons, painted candle sticks, a wooden chandelier.

Does not hold Mass.

## DUMBRAVA (the village of Livezile)

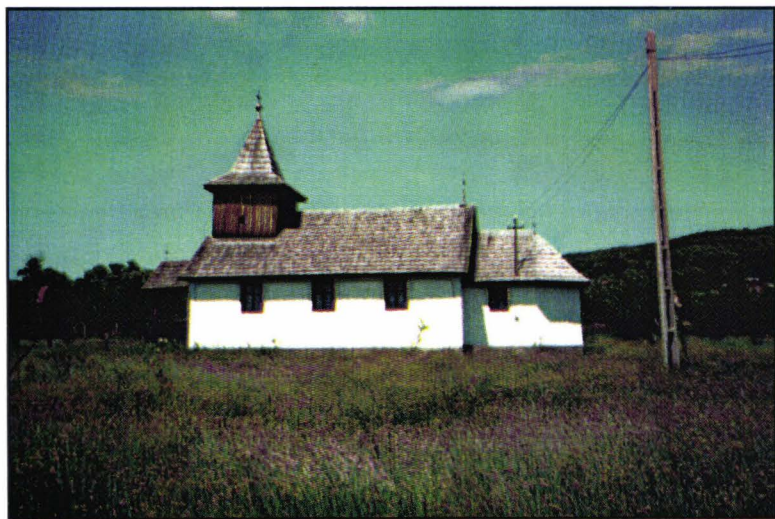
**Location and access:** Locality situated 14 km from Bistrița and 4 km from Livezile, both of which are on the Transylvanian Bistrița valley with DN17 linking them. From Livezile it is 4 km to Dumbrava.

**Patron Saint:** Archangels Michael and Gabriel.

**Year of construction:** 17th century in Susenii Bârgăului (village of Prundu-Bârgăului), where in 1909 it was removed and remade, to be once again moved and rebuilt in the center of the village of Dumbrava;

**Repairs:** multiple and of consequence.

**Preserved:** the epitaph on the new church (1780); the icons representing the Apostles painted on a beam; The Emperor Doors, richly carved (repainted); 2 icons of



The wooden church at Dumbrava



Archangel Michael; a sanctuary painted with tulips and 2 large painted candle sticks.

It is the only church in this gypsy community and holds Mass.

### **GERSA I (the village of Rebrișoara)**

**Location and access:** Gersa is on the valley by the same name, which flows into the Someșul Mare at Rebrișoara. It can be reached from Năsăud on DN17D to Rebrișoara (2 km) from where it is 2 km on the country road to Gersa I. It is located in the cemetery.

**Patron Saint:** Archangels Michael and Gabriel.

**Year of Construction:** 1721.

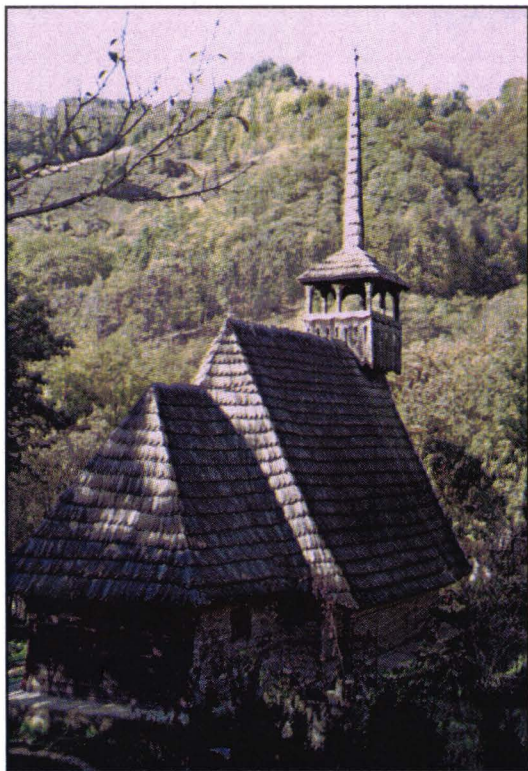
**Current Condition:**

- five-sided pronaos with south entrance;
- over the pronaos stands a tower on a square base with an arrow shaped narrowing helmet;
- rectangular naos with semi-cylindrical vault;
- three-sided altar with unhooked apsis;
- the windows have been enlarged, with only one of the old ones preserved in the apse apsis;
- most remarkable is the door beautifully carved with the rope motif, and a semi-cylindrical sculpted upper part;
- the shingle roof hangs low at the apse apsis.

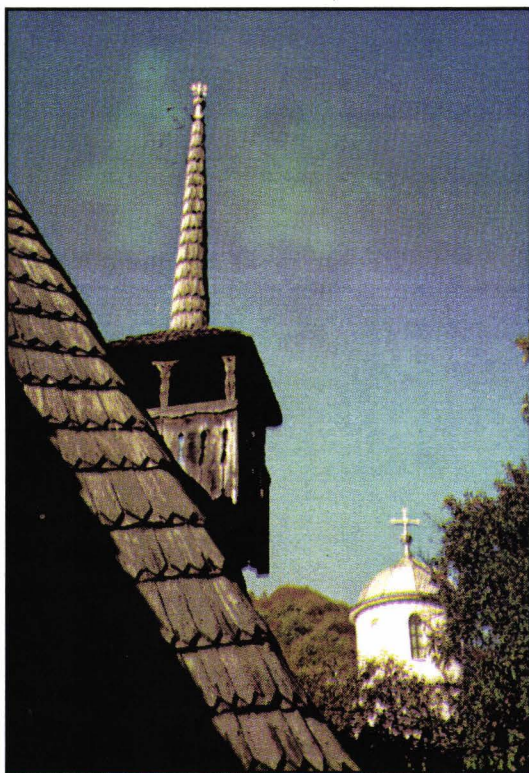
**Preserved:** the old iconostasis with three doors and several wooden painted icons from different periods: Archangel Michael (18th century); Assumption of the Virgin: Virgin Mary with the Infant (middle 18th century);

The Good Shepherd (1782), painted by Vasilică from Cătina; glass icons.

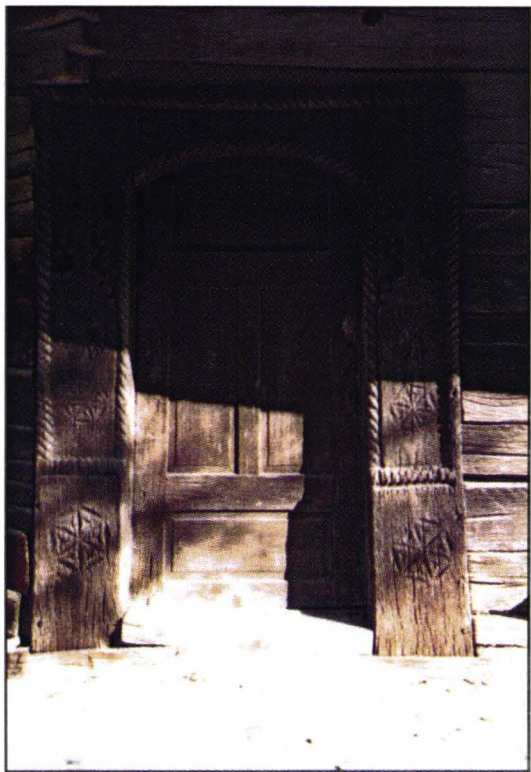
Does not hold Mass.



Gersa - the wooden church



Gersa - the tower of the old church  
and the tower of the new church



Gersa - the carved doorframe of the entrance door

### **PĂLTINEASA (the village of Spermezeu)**

**Location and access:** Locality situated upstream of Dumbrăvița, which can be reached by way of Dej, Beclean, Năsăud or Bistrița. From any of these towns one should get to Uriu, a locality on DN17, between Dej (20 km) and Beclean (8 km), and there switch to DJ171 (county road)



The wooden church at Păltineasa

leading along the valley of the Ilișua to upstream of Căianu Mic, and on to DC38 (country road) (unpaved) to Dumbrăvița and then Păltineasa.

**Patron Saint:** Assumption

**Year of construction:** 18th century

**Repairs:** the church was plastered on the inside and the outside and the windows enlarged at an unknown date.

**Current condition:** the layout of the church draws on that of the farmhouse;

- the plastered pronaos was separated from the naos through a solid wall, segmented, now fallen down;
- over the naos there is a small tower ending in a pyramid helmet;
- vaulted naos, semi-circular, partly destroyed;
- the four-sided apse apsis forms at the center a ridge presumably designed as round (rare occurrence in wooden constructions);
- iconostasis missing;
- the shingle roof covers all the rooms, but is badly deteriorated;
- poor conservation, necessitates urgent restoration or relocation.

## PIETRIȘ (the village of Cetate)

**Location and access:** Pietriș is 15 km SE of Bistrița, on the valley of the Budăcel, the right tributary of the Budac, at the northern edge of the Budac Depression. It can be reached from Bistrița on DJ173 (paved), then on 172G.

**Patron Saint:** Saint Dimitri.

**Year of construction:** 1748 in Ilva Mare, then moved to Pietris in the year 1903 (the village had previously no church).

**Repairs:** In 1966 a new tower was built and the interior was painted.

**Current condition:** rectangular plastered pronaos; a platform which covers half the naos;



- entrance door on the west side;
- vaulted naos;
- unhooked five-sided apse apsis;
- tile roof, lower over the altar;
- painted interior.

**Preserved:** 17 patron saint icons (out of the original 22); the painted iconostasis; the Emperor Icons (one of which is signed Vasilică of Cătina); the patron saint icon, signed Tudor Zugravul.

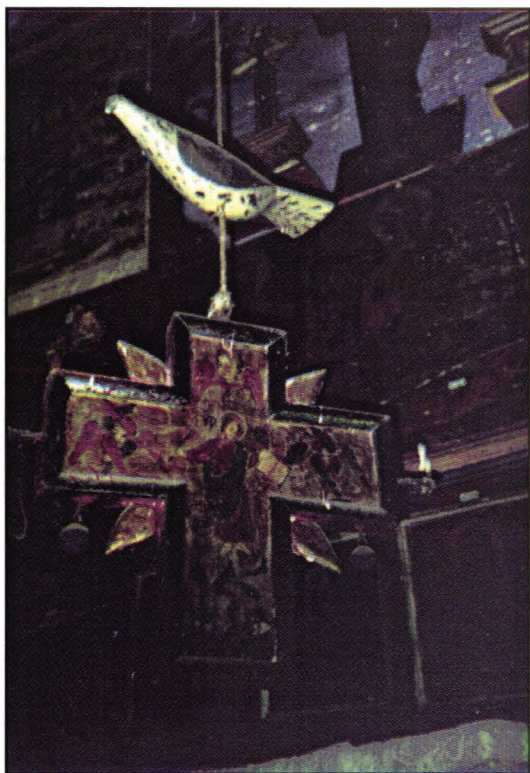
Three Masses held annually: Holy Thursday, Saint Elijah and November 1.

### **RUNCU SALVEI (the village of Salva)**

**Location and access:** The locality is on the valley of the Runcu, the right tributary of the Someșul Mare and can be



The wooden church at Pietriș



Wooden chandelier  
in the wooden church at Pietriș

reached from Năsăud by DN17D downstream of Salva (5 km), and on by the country road 41 (unpaved).

**Patron Saint:** Archangels Michael and Gabriel.

**Year of construction:** 1757, in the village cemetery.

**Restoration:** painting redone in 1784 by Vasile Hojda; the church was restored in 2001.

**Current condition:** rectangular naos and pronaos;





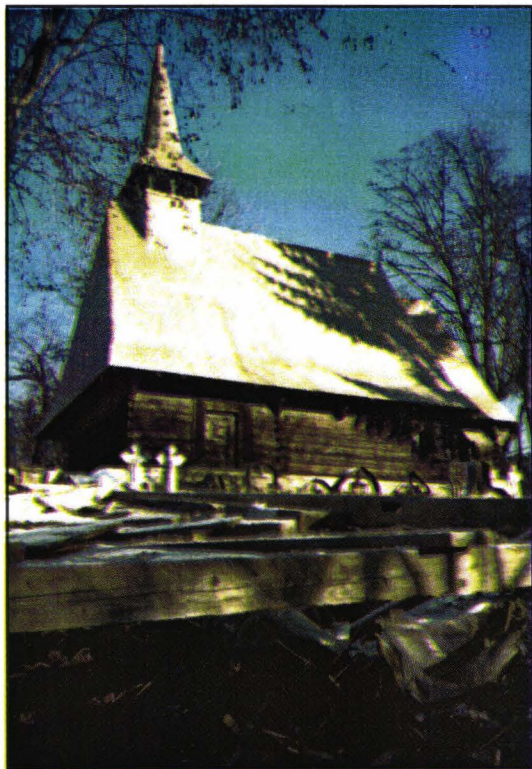
Dovetail joints - Runcu Salvei

- plastered pronaos separated from the naos by a solid wall;
- over the pronaos, on a square base, stands the tower with a tall helmet;
- unhooked five-sided apse;
- three-door iconostasis has no patron saint icons.

**Decoration:** geometrical patterns on the doorframe;

- crosses in different sizes fixed on the altar wall;
- obtrusive eaves propped by graded consoles united in a dovetail joint at the apse apsis.

**Preserved:** 4 Emperor Icons and the Patron Saint icon.



Runcu Salvei - the wooden church  
during restoration

**SĂLCUȚA****(the village of Sânmihaiu de Câmpie)**

**Location and access:** Sălcuța can be reached from Bistrița by DN17 to Sărățel (10 km), and from here by DN15A to the exit from Hernia to Reghin - Târgu-Mureș (7 km). Next take DJ172E leading to Lechința (6 km), and on to Sânmihaiu de Câmpie (17 km). Just before Sânmihaiu de Câmpie starts the country road 23B (unpaved) to Sălcuța.

**Patron Saint:** Archangels Michael and Gabriel.

**Year of construction:** first half of the 18th century, in the village cemetery (has a painted inscription: September 29, 1788 - probably the consecration day).

**Current condition:** five-sided polygonal pronaos, rectangular naos, separated from the pronaos by a full wall; five-sided unhooked apse apsis;

- according to the inscription over the portal, the interior decoration dates from 1788;
- the interior was entirely decorated and is quite visible in the apse apsis and the naos;
- in the naos, the inset portrait at the center of the vault shows Christ; then Mary with the Infant; laterally, the Miracles of Christ; Saint George;
- shingle roof, high and in one block.

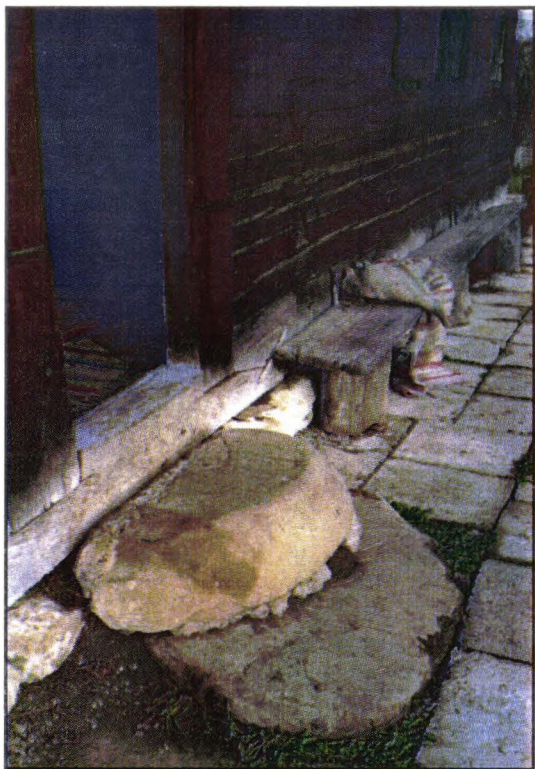
**Decoration:** graded consoles propping the slightly obtrusive eaves.

**Preserved:** the three-door iconostasis; the patron saint icons and the Emperor icons; glass icons painted by the artists of Nicula.

Holds Mass every Sunday and on Holy Days.



The wooden church at Sălcuța



Sandstone concretion - entrance steps  
to the wooden church at Sălcuța





Sălcuța - the inscription over the portal - 1788  
between the pronaos and the naos in the wooden church



Sălcuța - Apostles in the naos of the wooden church



Sălcuța - The lower part of the iconostasis with  
Jesus Christ crucified

### SĂRATA (the city of Bistrița)

**Location and access:** Sărata, a component of the city of Bistrița, is 10 km from the city itself, on the left bank of the Transylvanian Bistrița, downstream from the city.

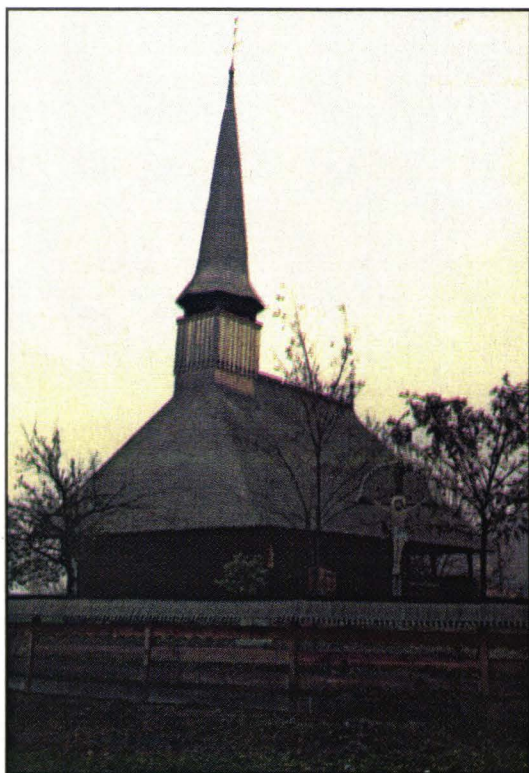
**Patron Saint:** Apostles Michael and Gabriel.

**Year of construction:** 1735.

**Restoration:** 1968 by the Direction of the Historical Monuments.

**Current condition:** the rectangular shape consists of the pronaos separated from the naos by a full wall;

- the unhooked apse apsis has three sides joining at right angles;
- the restoration introduced a new element: the porch (verandah) on the southern side;



The wooden church in Sărata

- shingle roof asymmetrical (southern section is gentler and elongated).

**Decoration:** many step consoles with interesting joints;

- the entrance door on the porch is on the southern side with the semi-circular upper portion and door frame decorated with the leaf motif and rosettes;





The entrance gate to the inner courtyard of the church at Sărata

- geometrical motifs displayed by the porch belt, at the base of the tower, at the windows (metal bars with ornaments);
- the pillars propping the roof end in forked beams fixed in place with wooden nails.

**Preserved:** the pronaos painted with scenes from the Fall, Noah's Arch, Constantine and Helen, etc.

- in the naos there are scenes of the Miracles and the Passion of Christ;
- the iconostasis shows the Crucifixion of Christ;
- in the altar: The Laying in the Tomb, the Crucifixion;
- a wooden chandelier;
- a painted cross and wooden icons.

Mass held on the Saint Patron's day. Has visiting hours.

## SÂNGEORZ BĂI

**Location and access:** Sângeorz-Băi, the town-spa, lies on the Someșul Mare, 57 km from Bistrița and 35 km from Năsăud on DN17D. The church is across the river.

**Dedication Day:** Annunciation.

**Year of construction:** It was built between 1749-1751.

Formerly a monastery church built on the Mărului Valley (Cormaia), it was brought to Sângeorz Băi in 1820 on a site on the left bank of the Someșul Mare, and from here it was removed to the place where it stands today, on the left bank district.

**Repairs:** Last removal added a closed porch.

**Current condition:**

- plastered pronaos;
- south entrance;
- vaulted, semi-cylindrical naos; unhooked apse apsis with three sides joining at right angles;
- the pronaos is separated from the naos by a full wall over which stands the platform with the tower;



The wooden church at Sângeorz-Băi

- the church is plastered inside;
- the roof in 4 waves forms a unit and rests on two posts on the apse corners, which provides an interesting variation.

**Exterior decoration:** cable mould at the door and windows.

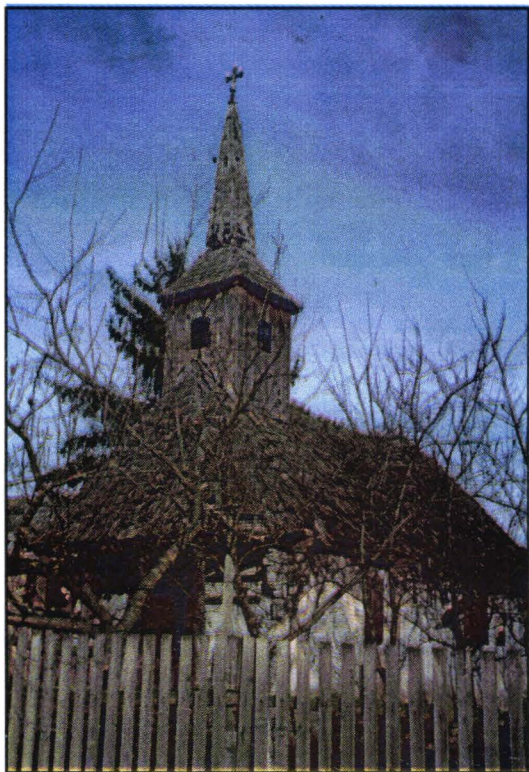
**Preserved:** the old iconostasis with the patron saint icons and the Apostles; the 4 Emperor icons, signed by Tudor Zugravul; the patron saint icon; 2 icons dating from 1784; glass icons; 2 candlesticks, as well as some inscriptions in Church Slavonic;

Holds Mass.

**SÂNGEORZUL NOU (the village of Lechința)**

**Location and access:** Sângeorzul Nou can be reached from Bistrița by DN17 to the intersection at Sărățel and then on DN15A to just south of Herina, where you switch to DJ172E at Lechința and continue on DJ151 to the abovementioned locality. The church can be reached by taking the road to Bungard.

**Patron Saint:** Pious Paraschiva.



The wooden church at Sângeorzul Nou

<https://biblioteca-digitala.ro> / <https://complexulmuzealbn.ro/>

**Year of construction:** Built at the middle of the 18th century in Figa, and brought in 1901 to the current site.

**Repairs:** the church was plastered during the repairs of 1957; today it is highly deteriorated and needs urgent repairs or removal to a museum institution.

**Current condition:** rectangular plane, with porch at the entrance;

- rectangular pronaos over which stands the tower on a square base with a less than tall helmet;
- vaulted, semi-cylindrical naos; three-sided apse apsis;
- exquisite joining of the groups of step consoles.

**Preserved:** the iconostasis in the old shape with 2 entrances; the old Emperor Doors richly carved; 4 wooden icons: Saint Paraschiva, Jesus Pantocrator, Mary and the Infant (2).

No Mass; highly degraded.

## SILIVAȘU DE CÂMPIE

**Location and access:** Silivașu de Câmpie is on DN16 (Târgu Mureș - Reghin - Cluj) and can be reached from any of the following towns: Cluj, Gherla, Luduș, Reghin, Târgu Mureș, Mureș, Bistrița. The church is at the northern edge of the locality.

**Patron Saint:** Pious Paraschiva.

**Year of construction:** 1622; erected by the local peasants, possibly in the place called "At the monastery" - either by or inside the forest - from where it was removed to the edge of the locality.





The belfry and church at Silivașu de Câmpie



The belfry and the church at Silivașu de Câmpie



The Silivașu de Câmpie belfry

**Repairs:** the roof was redone (slated) in 1999.

**Current state:** the church is called “The Front Church” by the locals;

- church without tower (the belfry tower stands next to it)\* but with porch;
- five-sided pronaos; rectangular naos separated from the pronaos by a wall with access door. Unlike in other churches the altar is larger and has three doors;

- the three rooms are vaulted;
- the interior shows traces of painting.

**Exterior decoration:** note the step consoles propping the obtrusive eaves.

**Preserved:** The Emperor Doors; the 4 patron saint icons and the 12 icons on the iconostasis;

- according to the inscription by Rednic (1772-1774), next to the church there might have stood a monastery (possibly the church of the monastery in the forest).

Mass held only on the Patron Saint Day and on the 8th of September (Sfânta Maria Mică).

## SILIVAȘU DE CÂMPIE - FÂNAȚE

**Location and access:** From Silivașu de Câmpie a country road (21A), or rather a dirt road, leads to a group of houses next to which stands the wooden church.

**Patron Saint:** Archangels Michael and Gabriel.

**Year of construction:** unknown (17th century?); brought from Socol, a locality also situated on DN16, where it functioned as a hermitage in the woods (a monastery in the woods like Silivașu de Câmpie).

**Repairs:** the walls inside were covered with tarred paper and painted;

- the shingle roof was replaced by tile.

**Current state:** the layout is inspired by that of the farmhouse, with the addition of the altar;

- farmhouse type of church, no windows (with air "vents", later replaced by windows) and no painting;





The wooden church and the belfry  
at Silivașu de Câmpie



Apse joints (exterior)

Fânatele Silvașului de Câmpie

<https://biblioteca-digitala.ro/> / <https://complexulmuzealbn.ro/>



Joints in the sector of the access  
ladder to the attic and the porch  
ending, at the end of the pronaos -  
Fânațele Silvașului de Câmpie

- no tower and the belfry stands next to the church;
- plastered pronaos, naos with cylindrical vault and three-side apse apsis;
- the Communion table sculpted out of one tree trunk;
- motifs: geometrical patterns, stylized Tree of Life, cable moulding.

**Preserved:** the old iconostasis;

- on the southern side of the church the original porch has been preserved;
- this type of porch is a 17th century occurrence.

The only church in the village. Mass held every Sunday and on Holy Days.

## STRUGURENI

**Location and access:** The locality of Strugureni is on DJ172E, between Chiochiș (3 km) and Matei (4 km), two villages situated the one at 20 km from Beclean, the other at 27 km from Bistrița. From Beclean, by DJ172A one can get to Chiochiș and from here it is 3 km to Strugureni. Matei and Strugureni can also be reached from Bistrița on the Bistrița-Sărățel route (10 km on DN17) - Herina (5 km on DN15A) - Lechința (6 km on DJ172E) - Matei (7 km on DJ172E). The church was removed from the hill down in the valley by the stream.

**Patron Saint:** Archangels Michael and Gabriel.

**Year of construction:** first half of the 18th century.

**Repairs:** 1930. Due to landslides, in 1980 it was removed to the central square in the village.



The wooden church at Strugureni



The wooden chandelier at Strugureni

**Current condition:** five-sided pronaos with south entrance giving on a porch with four posts;

- rectangular naos, unhooked apse apsis;
- the painting on the walls is covered with plywood;
- during removal to the village some of the planks on the painted vault were reversed.

**Preserved:** fragments of the painting on the vault and the iconostasis are uncovered; 2 icons dated 1791: Archangels Michael and Gabriel and Mary and the Infant; 1 icon from 1798: Mary and the Infant; 1 chandelier.

It is the only church in the village. Holds Mass.

### **SUPLAI (the village of Zagra)**

**Location and access:** The locality is situated on the Zagra Valley, close to the spring, on DJ172 (paved all the way to Zagra), which diverts from DN17D at Mocod (8 km downstream from Mocod and 16 km upstream of Beclean). From Mocod to Suplai it is 24 km, of which only the first 9 are paved. The church is in the village central square.

**Patron Saint:** Archangels Michael and Gabriel.

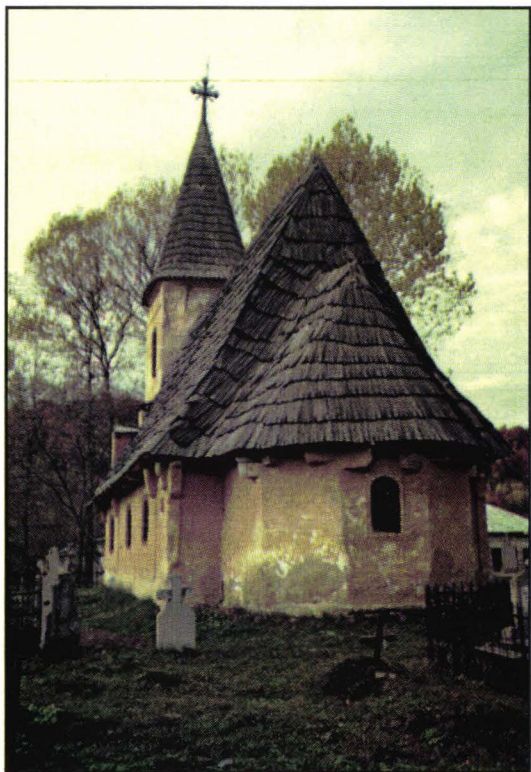
**Year of construction:** 1711.

**Repairs:** in 1880 a stone belfry tower was added and the whole edifice was plastered.

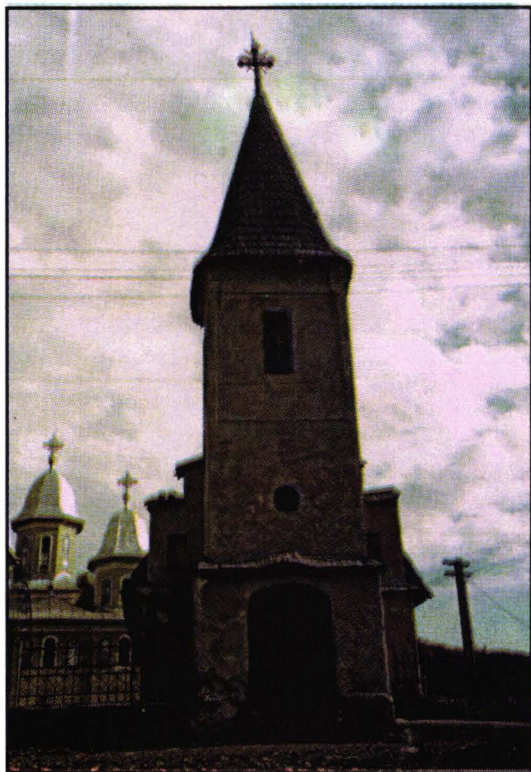
**Current condition:** rectangular plan formed by the plastered pronaos, the naos with a semi-cylindrical vault and unhooked apse apsis, with 5 sides;

- the pronaos is separated from the naos by a partition wall segmented at eyelevel;
- the church is covered with shingle.

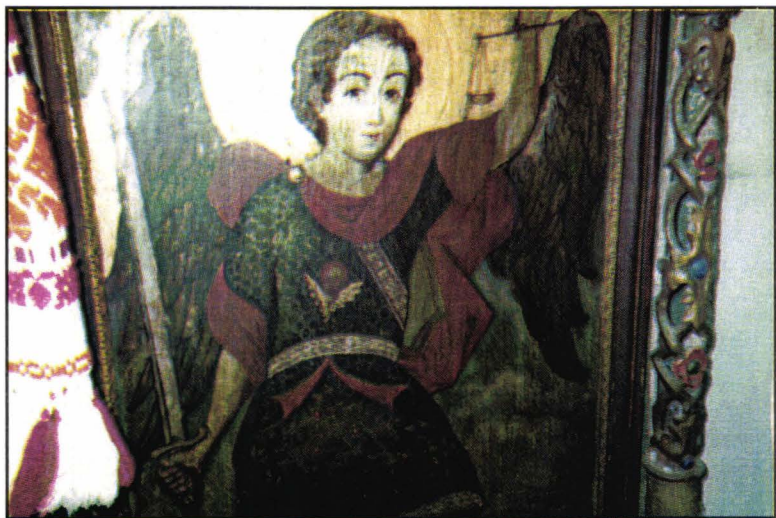




The wooden church at Suplai



The stone tower of the wooden church  
at Suplai



Icon in the wooden church at Suplai



The central part of the iconostasis at Suplai





The upper part of the iconostasis  
with Jesus Christ crucified - Suplai

**Preserved:** slight traces of painting on the altar; the iconostasis with the Emperor Icons; patron saint icons; the Apostles' frieze with Jesus at the center; the Emperor Door, beautifully carved.

## ȚIGĂU

**Location and access:** The locality of Țigău is 25,5 km SW of Bistrița and can be reached by DN17 to Sărățel (10 km), then on by DJ172G to Chiraleș (13 km), where Țigău is 1 km away by DC27A (unpaved). The church is in the cemetery.

**Patron Saint:** Pious Paraschiva

**Year of construction:** 1760 - inscription on the doorframe

“v leat 1760”; brought here from Șarul Dornei in 1760.

**Restorations:** Restored by the Direction of the Historical Monuments in 1979.

**Current condition:** plastered pronaos with 5 sides and south entrance;

- pronaos is separated from the naos by a full wall;
- over the naos stands a square tower with a low helmet on an octagonal base;



The wooden church at Țigău

- rectangular naos with semi-cylindrical vault;
- the altar has 5 sides, unhooked apsis and is plastered;
- painting can be traced on the altar, on the lateral walls and in the naos; signed by Ioan Ștențel of Sânmărghita (1776).
- covered with shingle.

**Exterior decoration:** cable rope belt sculpted on the doorframe and step consoles where the sides of the pronaos join the apse;

Holds Mass. The only Orthodox church in a village whose majority is Hungarian.



Wooden vesper bell and window with shutters at Țigău

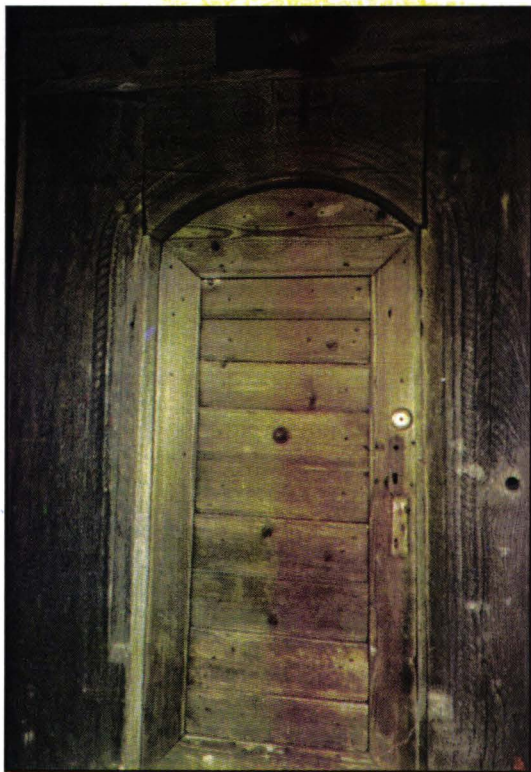




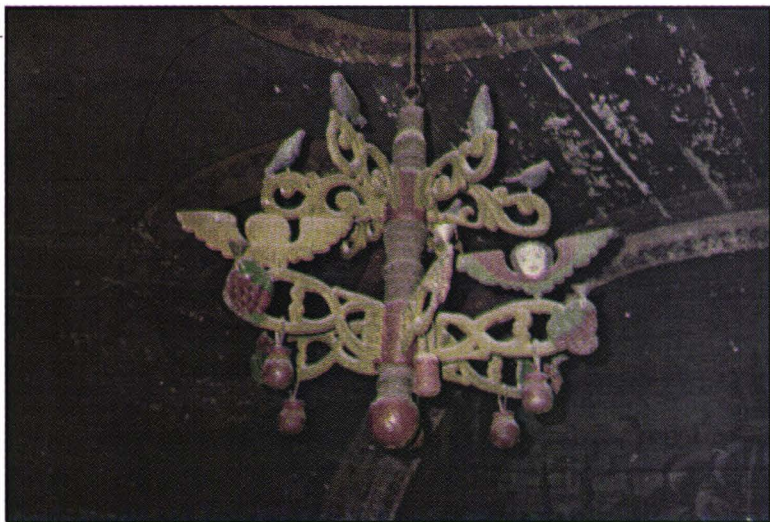
Decoration on the church door at Țigău. Detail.



The Holy Virgin - detail - painting  
in the wooden church at Țigău



The door of the wooden church at  
Țigău



Wooden chandelier in the church at Țigău

## ZAGRA

**Location and access:** The locality is on the Valley by the same name (the Zagra Valley), which springs from the Țibleș Mountains. This is why some atlases mention it by the wrong name: the Valley of Țibleș. From Mocod, situated on DN17D between Beclean (16 km) and Năsăud (8 km), 9 km down the paved road DJ172 and you arrive at Zagra. The church stands on the hill.

**Patron Saint:** Pious Paraschiva.

**Year of construction:** It was built in 1640 in the village of Perișor, and in 1938 it was brought on the current site (on the land of the Onișor family) by Gavrilă Onișor. It is known as the church "On the bridge".

**Restoration:** 1976.



**Current condition:** plastered pronaos, with five sides and south entrance;

- the pronaos is separated from the naos by a full wall;
- the rectangular naos has a semi-cylindrical vault propped on a double arch;
- the unhooked apsis is five-sided.

**Exterior decoration:** step massive consoles at the pronaos and the apse apsis, and dovetail joints;

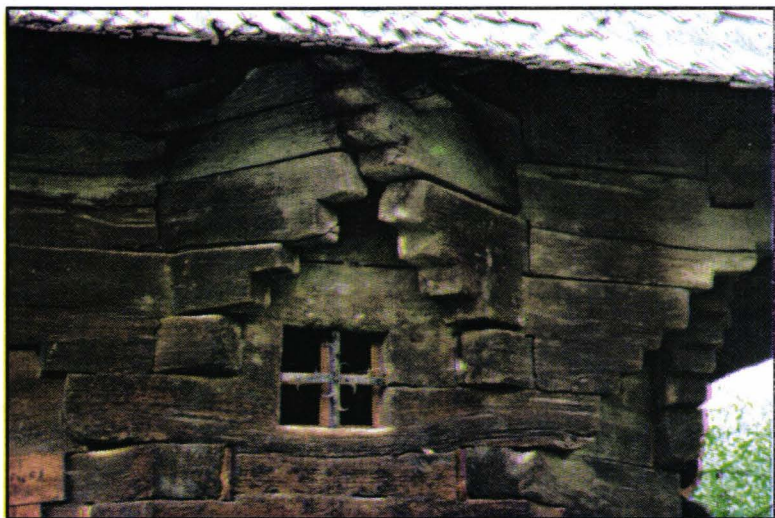
- narrow door with massive doorframe has an upper semi-circular opening.

**Preserved:** two-door isonostasis (archaic element) and hardly visible traces of wall painting.

Mass has never been held in the church, since it is, in a way, private property.



The wooden church at Zagra



Apse joints at the exterior. Detail.  
Iron wrought window

### 3. Some considerations

Some considerations are in order on the wooden churches in Northern Transylvania for they display significant differences.

Let us first note that some of the wooden churches are located in the central area of the locality (Dobricel, Dumbrava, Strugureni, Sărata, Burdulenii, Gersa I, Runcu Salvei, Sângeorz Băi, Sângeorzu Nou, Suplai), while others are at the edge of the locality (Apatiu, Bungard, Păltineasa, Pietriș, Sălcuța, Silivașu de Câmpie-Fânațe, Țigău, Zagra).

A small number of churches are situated next to the cemetery (Apatiu, Runcu Salvei, Sălcuța, Silivașu de



Câmpie, Țigău). One wooden church alone - Dobricel - is surrounded by a wall.

Of the 20 wooden churches, 11 have for their patron saints Saint Apostles Michael and Gabriel; 4 have for their patron saint Pious Paraschiva, while the rest have the following: Saint Apostles Peter and Paul, Birth of the Holy Virgin, Saint Dimitri, Annunciation.

The number of the wooden churches with the classic type porches incorporating the entrance to the church is four (Sărata, Silivașu de Câmpie, Silivașu de Câmpie-Fânațe, Strugureni). The following churches have been repaired: Apatiu (1962), Bungard (1950), Budurleni (1925), Dumbrava (1909, 1957), Pietriș (1966), Sângeorz Băi (1820, 1999), Sângeorzu Nou (1901, 1957), Silivașu de Câmpie (1999), Strugureni (1930, 1980), Suplai (1880), Zagra (1938). The repairs have indeed saved the wooden churches yet diminished their value.

Restorations implemented on the agreement (benefiting, at times, also from the financial and technical help) of the Direction of the Historical Monument of the Ministry of Culture have been carried out on the wooden churches at Dobricel, Gersa I, Runcu Salvei, Sărata, Țigău. Thus, 5 wooden churches were restored out of a total of 22 at the time of the first operation. Four restorations out of five were performed before 1989, which does not put us in too good a light. Instead, the stone historical monuments were restored: evangelical churches, castles and architectonic complexes.

The mobile patrimony of these wooden churches, a most valuable one consisting of old religious books, chalices,

wooden icons, glass icons, has dwindled progressively. In the wooden churches today one can still find fragments of painting on canvas or directly on wood, on the walls or the vault of the pronaos, the naos and the apse (Apatiu, Bistrița, Bungard, Budurleni, Dobricel, Păltineasa, Sărata, Sălcuța, Silivașu de Câmpie, Strugureni, Suplai, Țigău, Zagra), wooden icons (Bungard, Dobricel, Dumbrava, Gersa I, Pietriș, Runcu Salvei, Sălcuța, Sărata, Sângeorz Băi, Sângeorzu Nou, Silivașu de Câmpie, Strugureni, Suplai), glass icons (Burduleni, Dobricel, Sălcuța, Sângeorz Băi).

The fact that few of the wooden churches still hold Mass (Apatiu, Bungard, Budurleni, Dumbrava, Sălcuța, Sângeorz Băi, Silivașu de Câmpie-Fânațe, Strugureni, Țigău), combined with their relatively isolated location (at the edge of localities), endangers them as buildings in general and their patrimony, in particular.

The theft of the sacred objects, especially icons, from the churches, on the increase in the last decades, raises the issue of the safeguard of this patrimony.

We feel justified in asking: why, when the community decides to erect a new church does it not also repair the old church? The repair or, as the case may be, the restoration of an old wooden church is no less significant to the community than the building of a new church.

Many of the valuable objects of the wooden and stone churches were brought before 1989 to the Archpriest Residence where they lie in store; they are not available for public viewing, hereby including the believers. There are solutions to these problems and hopefully they will be implemented. The protection of the churches and their

cultural patrimony must and can be ensured, for their scientific and cultural value can be easily capitalized on. But everything should be performed on the agreement, under the supervision, and with the financial and technical help of the state institutions. Any and all local communities, non-governmental organizations, and physical persons in our country and abroad are also invited either to sustain or even assume the abovementioned agenda.

A survey of the spatial distribution of the wooden churches in Northern Transylvania shows that out of a total of 20, 13 are situated south of the Someșul Mare valley, while 7 are north of the valley. If one were to consider also the wooden churches that have deteriorated in time, then one will admit that their distribution was balanced and the Romanians in Northern Transylvania built these churches with ease and speed.

The wooden architecture does indicate some differences between the wooden churches, yet a certain type of wooden church particular to Northern Transylvania takes contour, the most representative of which is the wooden church at Zagra, with others also falling in this typology, the most typical being those at Apatiu, Bungard, Dobricel, Sălcuța, Sângeorzu Nou. We hereby include also the churches whose architecture was altered during repairs. The only differing ones are those at Silivașu de Câmpie and Silivașu de Câmpie-Fânațe situated south in the territory, that is, in the northern part of the Transylvania Plain. These churches have no towers, and the belfry stands separately from the church. This type of wooden churches is characteristic of the Transylvania Plain. The

evidence of the transition to the second type is supplied by the wooden church at Sălcuța, which does have a tower but also a belfry. The latter, however, stands separate from the church. This is a unique case.

Some of the architectural elements (the tower, the helmet, the porch or the verandah, the simple or step roof) of the wooden churches in Northern Transylvania are inspired by the architecture of the wooden churches in the neighbouring counties. Thus, the churches without towers, with porches and with a belfry standing separate reported by the survey in the South of the area belong to the architectural type characteristic of the Transylvanian Plain; the church with a high helmet at Gersa I betrays the influence of the Maramures architecture. This is all very possible, but the design of the churches might as well be accountable to the general historical development.

#### **4. Other Possible words**

On writing about the wooden churches we realized that there was much more to be said, all of which could result in a book of a different scope, one deemed necessary.

Since our present endeavour is simply a guide, we left out such parts as might carry enticing titles: "The locals and their religion", "Between the sky and the earth - the wood", "When and who did the building?" "Crosses and graveyards", "Losses and sins", "Identity questioned" "Where do we go from here?"

In the beginning our intention was simply to announce that the wooden churches still exist and to indi-

cate their locations, to sound the alarm that many of the wooden churches have fallen victim to neglect, that those relocated and repaired have lost their original appearance.

Wooden churches have disappeared not so much as the result of the action of particular individuals, but rather due to disuse, neglect, poor maintenance, all of which in time caused them to fall into ruin. Those that were repaired are similar but not identical to the originals. The shingle was replaced by tile or tin (Silivaşu de Câmpie-Fânaţe, Strugureni), the porch is obviously an innovation (Budurleni) and some had both their interiors and exteriors plastered (Dumbrava, Suplai, etc.).

The wooden churches in Northern Transylvania were first erected in early 15th century, yet even earlier the Romanians had been building worship places identical to their houses with an extra building standing by and harbouring the bell that called the congregation to prayer. This early type of church, with the belfry separated, has been preserved in the south of Bistriţa-Năsăud county, in the hilly area of the Plain of Transylvania (Silivaşu de Câmpie, Silivaşu de Câmpie-Fânaţe). The two wooden churches at Silivaş have porches, as do the wooden houses of the local villagers. Moreover, the wooden church at Silivaşu de Câmpie-Fânaţe displays at the end of the porch a ladder leading up to the attic.

All of these wooden churches are humble in appearance as compared to the churches of the non-Romanian population. They are rather self-effacing, as if the Romanians who built them preferred to be ignored by the foreigners in the land. It would seem as if this exces-

sive fear towards the powerful foreigners and temporary landlords suppressed their wish to build tall churches. Or was it perhaps prohibited? For a while, yes! Some of those already built fell victims to retaliation and few escaped burning down on the orders of General Bucow in June 1761. At the time, a number of 122 Orthodox churches had been recorded, most of which were made of wood. In all likelihood only the villages inhabited by the Saxons had no churches, a remarkable feat if we consider the very restrictive policy concerning churches as first marked by the resolution of 1271 passed by the Catholic Synod at Buda, followed by such like measures as taken in the 14th century and as late as the 18th century.

The second half of the 18th century marked an increase in the number of wooden churches in this area to the point where almost every village displayed a church.

As one moves north from the south of the county, one notices that the wooden churches are no longer located on lower land (as at Silivaș) but on lofty sites with maximum visibility (Bidiu, Apatiu, Bungard, Sălcuța). On the same direction, the belfry standing separately gradually disappears whereas the tower gains height. Within a short distance, from the south to the north of the county, a gradual transition is noticeable from the churches with no towers (Silivașu de Câmpie-Fânațe) to the churches with high towers (Gersa, Runcu Salvei).

All the wooden churches bear resemblance to the farmhouse. Theirs is the layout of the peasant household and consists of the rectangular **naos**, at times elongated, with the **apse apsis** positioned eastwards and the **pronaos**, westwards.

The dimensions, forms and assemblages are diverse and interesting.

**The apse apsis** is, at times, a prolongation of the naos (Păltineasa, Strugureni), but most frequently is unhooked and has several sides. At Apatiu, Dobricel, Gersa, Sângeorz Băi, Sângeorzu Nou, the wooden churches have a three-sided apsis. The churches of Budurleni, Pietriș, Runcu Salvei, Sălcuța, Țigău, Zagra, have a five-sided apsis forming a semicircular space inside and polygonal, outside.

**The pronaos** is rectangular in some churches, and five-sided in others (Budurleni, Dobricel, Gersa, Sărata, Strugureni, Țigău, Zagra). The churches with a five-sided pronaos and the apse with an equal number of sides prove that there arose the need for more inner space.

The pronaos is separated from the naos by a full wall with a door or a full wall and a door and openings at  $\frac{1}{3}$  the distance from the top. In some of the churches the lower part of the pronaos is plastered leaving on top some platform room for the young people in the congregation.

**The naos** has a semi-cylindrical vault which starts at the level of the walls, while in the axis one can note the artisan's beam in the shape of cabled rope.

**The apse apsis** is plastered or has a low semi-circular vault. The iconostasis usually has three doors, but two-door iconostases can also be encountered at Dobricel, Fânațele Silivașului, Păltineasa, Sărata, Sângeorzu Nou, Zagra.

Several of the wooden churches have enlarged windows, but some (Dobricel, Păltineasa, Țigău) have



remained small and are secured with iron wrought bars and shutters.

The wooden churches are edifices valued for their beauty as well as for their ingenuous wood joints. The attraction is provided by the dovetail joints of the step consoles that prop up the roof, quite pronounced at the apsis and the pronaos. The wooden doorframes are decorated with cable rope and additional rhombi, rosettes, etc.

The interior complements the exterior beauty of the wooden church: the vaults, the iconostases and especially the paintwork.

The painting, the most valuable element in a wooden church but also the most vulnerable, has had a lot to suffer. Executed by Transylvanian painting artisans - Tudor Zugravu at Sângeorz and Pietriș; Vasilică of Cătina at Pietriș and Gersa; the painters from Nicula at Leurda, Ștențel of Sânmărghita, who painted in 1776 the wooden church at Țigău; Zaharie Apitis of Sineft, Pop Vasile and Vasile Hojda, who painted the church at Runcu Salvei. The painting in the wooden churches in Bistrița-Năsăud county, although only partially and poorly preserved, still is impressive.

The artisan painters have generally observed the hermeneutic order, however novel scenes are at times featured reversing the consecrated sequence.

In the plastered **pronaos** the painting covers the walls and is poorly conserved in several churches, but its endurance is remarkable if one were only to take the example of the painting still preserved on the west wall of the wooden church at Bidiu, which has fallen to the ground

and whose roof is missing. Here, at Bidiu, we find the "fetele nebune" (the foolish girls) although "Doomsday" would have been the regular painting.

Most frequent in the pronaos are the representations of the Holy Virgin, Elijah, The Fall, Noah's Ark, Saint Paraschiva.

In the **naos**, on the semi-cylindrical vault of most of the wooden churches are represented scenes of the Miracles and Passion of Jesus Christ, Saint George, Pious Paraschiva, Adam and Eve with the Tree and the serpent, Saint Elijah. The scenes are best preserved in the churches of Sălcuța, Strugureni, Țigău.

At Runcu Salvei, the vault features representations of The Holy Virgin and Jesus Christ surrounded by the Prophets. The lateral walls feature the Martyrs, The Sunday of the Bearers of Spices (Easter Sunday), The Sunday of Saint Thomas, and scenes of the Miracles and Passion of Jesus Christ.

In the **apse apsis** the painting was preserved in few cases, with the most frequent scenes being those of Abraham's offering, Christ's crucifixion, The Holy Hierarchs, The Laying in the tomb, The Holy Virgin with the hoards of angels.

The **iconostasis** in most of the wooden churches of Bistrita-Nasaud is sculpted and painted with vegetal and geometrical patterns, but does not always observe the rule of featuring the saint patron icons. The Apostles in a row with Jesus Christ at the centre are presented.

The Emperor icons: Saint Nicholas, the Holy Virgin with the Infant, Jesus Christ, and the patron saint icons are also present.

The **Emperor Doors** are also richly carved with portraits of the Annunciation and the four Evangelists.

In the naos of some of the churches one can still encounter the old wooden chandeliers with birds and angels.

In several of the wooden churches the painting on canvas glued on wood was stripped if found deteriorated and the wooden walls were subsequently plastered with new icons hung rather randomly. The iconostases were thus robbed of valuable wooden icons.

The restoration of the churches, especially of the painting, is very expensive, and the acquisition of valuable old wooden icons is almost impossible.

The restoration of the painting in just one wooden church exceeds today one billion lei and it only makes one wonder at its rash removal from the walls by the believers themselves who argued it was less than beautiful. They were deceived by the offer of beautiful icons, which they substituted for the “ugly” yet valuable ones. Even in the absence of any actual deceiver, they themselves took down from the iconostases the “ugly saints” and replaced them with “beautiful saints”. They did the same in their own houses.

Ignorance made the priests, the deacons and those in charge of the parish property give away or else leave to destruction the community's greatest treasure.

Indeed, there are new churches and parish houses in most of our villages, but of incomparably lesser value than the old wooden churches, which even now are neglected. Nor are they at least repaired or protected. How can one find it so difficult to understand that a wooden church

- a historical monument - is the rural community's greatest treasure? What is the prize possession of Gersa, Dobricel, Bungard, Sălcuța, etc, if not the wooden church?

If we do not pay heed, the wooden churches at Păltineasa, Sângeorzu Nou, Silivașu de Câmpie and others will soon turn into simple memories; the wooden churches at Păltineasa and Sângeorzu Nou must be saved by relocation and restoration at the shortest possible.

Curious as it may seem, not only the churches but the crosses too have to be saved. At Bidiu, the wooden church has fallen to the ground, destroyed by time and neglect, but is surrounded by a sensational cemetery: a "stone cemetery". The tombstones are not crosses but stones collected from the site - from fields, ravines, streams - and not just ordinary stones, but stones with a shape: "strange", "weird" stones. These stones are sandstone concretions and belong to the sandstone group (sharpening stone - whetstone).

These were the early tombstones used by the Romanian population at Bidiu and not only - the Romanians in Apatiu and many other impoverished locals of the villages where such strange stones could be found (Bungard, Sălcuța, etc.)

The cemetery at Bidiu is located on a hill towering over the village. The wooden church is here too. The church has fallen to the ground over the cemetery, but the stone crosses are still standing in the old section of the cemetery. These stone crosses bear no incisions of the cross and the older graves are not personalized. Later, all of the concretions or fragments of concretions or sand-

stones used for crosses were marked with the cross and personalized (the name of the deceased and the year of death). Moreover, some of them are whitewashed in white and dark blue "mneriu". They suggest the bond connecting between the "house - home" and the "house of eternity" and urge one to accept, or at least contemplate the "house" in the cemetery as one's house too awaiting us by the church in the village, along with all the dead of the village.

The stone crosses - (sandstone concretions) have not received any attention. Rather the contrary, they have been abandoned to the mercy of time just like the church, although the cemetery at Bidiu is unique in the world with its strangely shaped stones for crosses. Similar to the cemetery at Bidiu is that of Apatiu, albeit with fewer stone crosses on the graves but with the old wooden church still standing. This cemetery was once like the one at Bidiu, as were others in the area. From among them all, the cemetery at Bidiu is best preserved.

The sandstone concretions (trovanți, dorobanți, bălătruci) - natural formations whose shapes resemble those of animals and seem to be man-made sculptures - have found their utility as tombstones only here. Recognised for their cultural value (ornamental) the tombstones lend the cemetery of Bidiu an extraordinary value.

This cemetery was never officially included in the cultural tourist circuits. Nevertheless, it should be protected and preserved. Since the crosses are made of stone, the cemetery stands a good chance to outlast all others. It is original, unprecedented, shocking and few people know that it owes its existence to the poverty of the

local Romanians. They could not afford to purchase wooden or stone crosses. Should they have fashioned their own? They did not have the time and they could not write. Their descendants could even now relate how their ancestors would find while tilling the land a larger stone in some form or another, how they would pick it up and carry it home saying: "...I'll take it home and save it for when I die."

The tombstones at Bidiu, Apatiu and others should be integrated within the overall historical development for being a novelty in form and occurrence. It is the same historical development that produced the "banner" wooden crosses still present in the cemetery at Mărișelu, once present but now gone also in the cemeteries of the old wooden churches at Domnești and Nețeni.

There must have been an early powerful Christian center in Northern Transylvania, as testified to not only by the wooden churches of which few are left today but also by the wonderful and original stone crosses and crucifixions at Ciceu, Corabia, Hășmașu Ciceului, Ciceu Giurgești, Negrilești, Căianu Mic, Rusu Bârgăului, Piatra Fântânele, Mireș and Dobric.

Part of the unique Romanian folk lore, the tombstones, the votive crosses and the stone crucifixions together with the wooden churches are the valued items of a priceless national treasure.

This guide is rather sad in tone, yet it is so by necessity. If instead it had been a book, we would have wandered among the details missing to make the point that will determine someone, sometime, to decide it was time the churches no longer be left prey to implacable Time.



The ruins of the wooden church at Bidiu



“Cele cinci fete ne bu ne” (The five foolish girls) - painting on the wall of the pronaos of the wooden church at Bidiu (the wall is still standing)

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“Cele cinci fete ne bu ne” (The five foolish girls) - painting on the wall of the pronaos of the wooden church at Bidiu (the wall is still standing)



“Cele cinci fete ne bu ne” (The five foolish girls) - painting on the wall of the pronaos of the wooden church at Bidiu (the wall is still standing)



"The Angel of the Bearers of Spices to the Tomb" - painting on the wall of the pronaos of the wooden church at Bidiu



"The women who do ..." - painting on the wall of the pronaos of the wooden church at Bidiu





“Adam and Eve” with the Tree and the serpent - painting on the wall of the pronaos of the wooden church at Bidiu



The little entrance gate to the grounds of the church at Dobricel



The wooden church at Silivașul de Câmpie



Zagra - the wooden church - wood joints





The wooden church at  
Șieu Sfântu in the year 2000



The stone crucifixion in front of the wooden church in the park of the Museum Complex of Bistrița-Năsăud (relocated from Prundu Bârgăului)



The stone crucifixion at Mireș





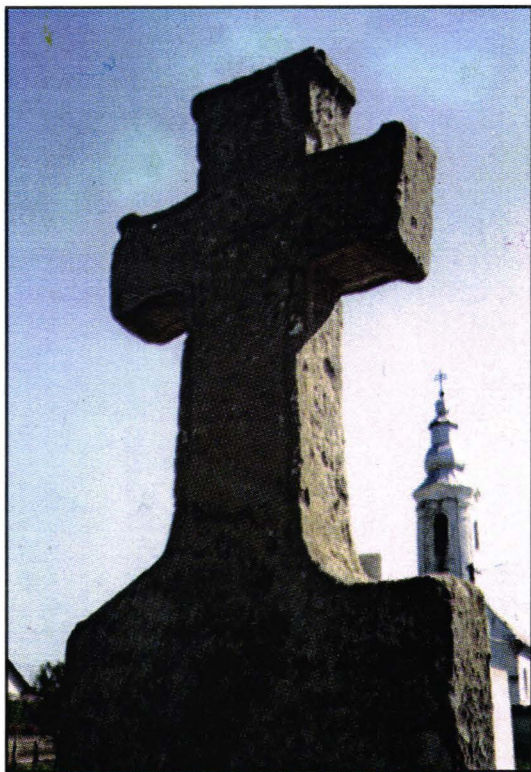
The stone crucifixion at Mireș  
- detail -



The stone cross at Hășmașu Ciceului



The triptych/cross with the crucifixion  
type of arch at Dobric

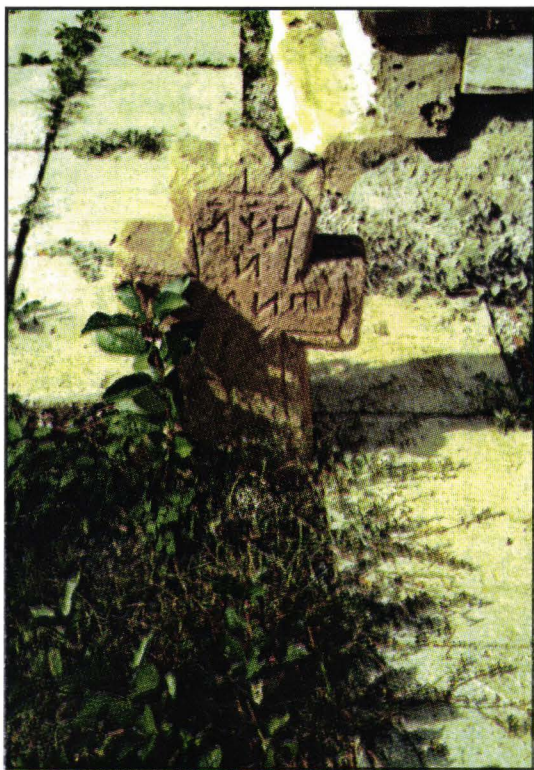


The stone cross at Cristeștii Ciceului



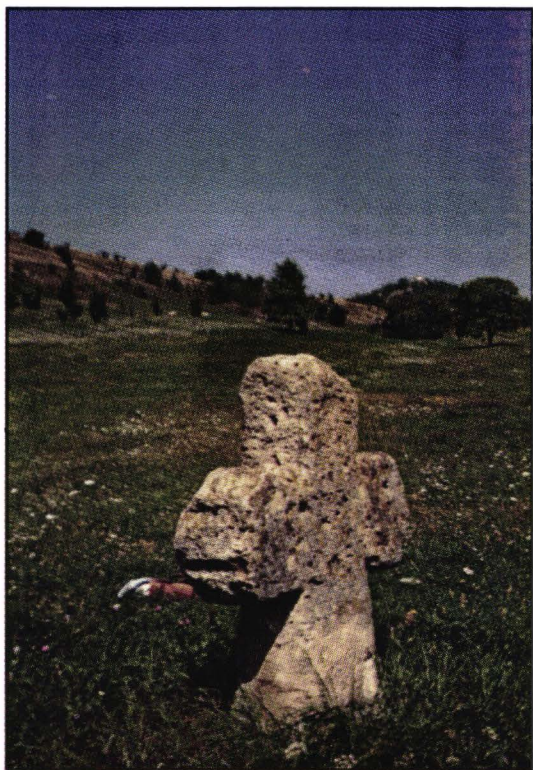


The stone cross at Dobricel



The stone cross at Sălcuța





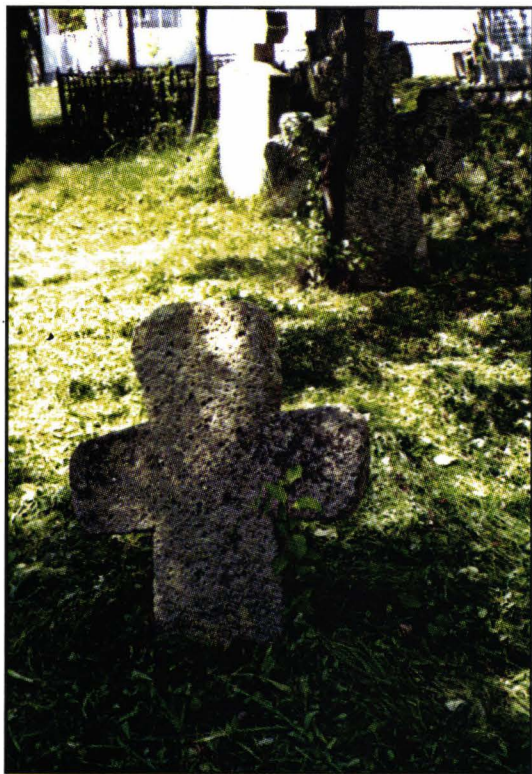
The stone cross at Ciceu Corabia



The stone cross at Ciceu Corabia

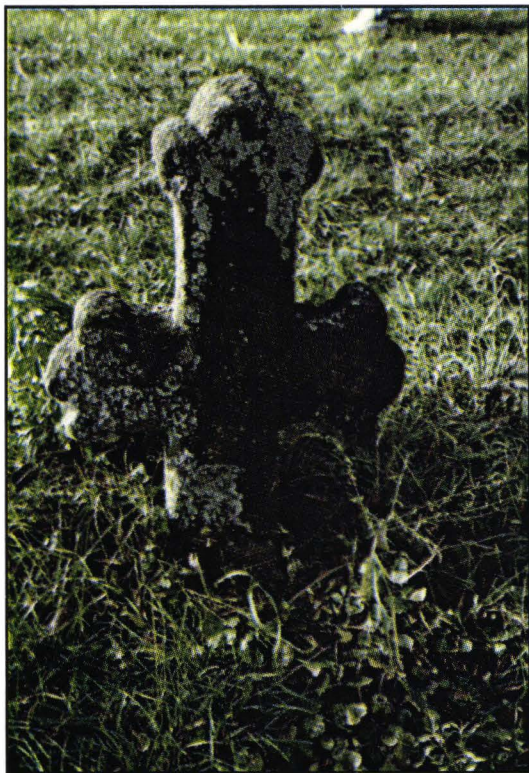


Stone cross at Ciceu Corabia

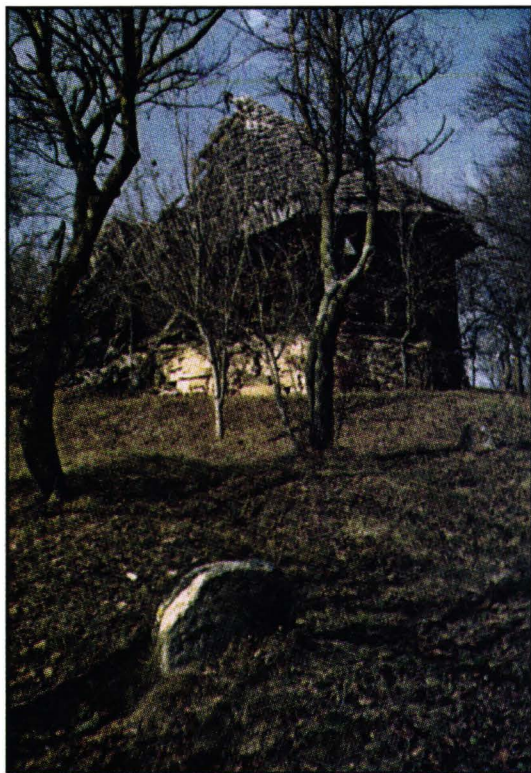


The stone cross at Ciceu Corabia





Stone cross at Țâgșor



The wooden church at Bidiu in the  
cemetery "with stones"  
(sandstone concretion set as tombstones)





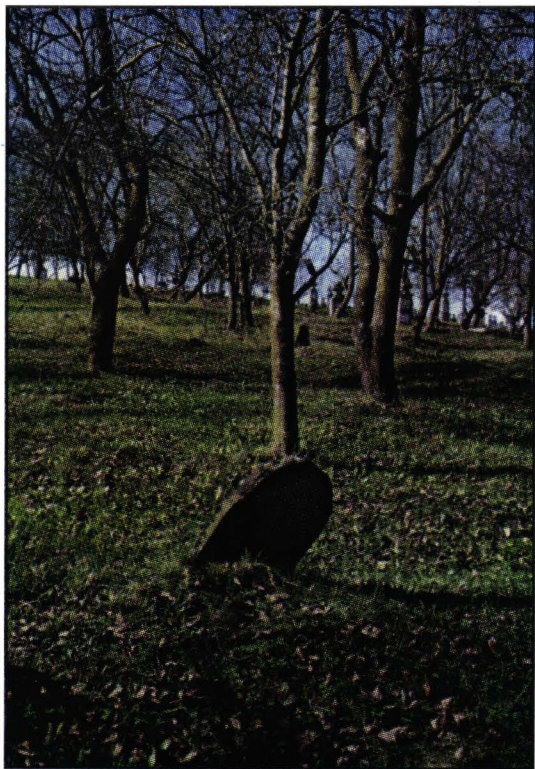
Tombstones - cross and sandstone concretion -  
in the cemetery at Bidiu



Sandstone concretion - tombstones  
in the cemetery of Bidiu



Sandstone concretion - tombstone  
and the new church at Bidiu



Tombstone,  
in the cemetery at Bidiu





Fragment of sandstone concretion,  
tombstone, personalized and white-  
washed in the cemetery at Bidiu

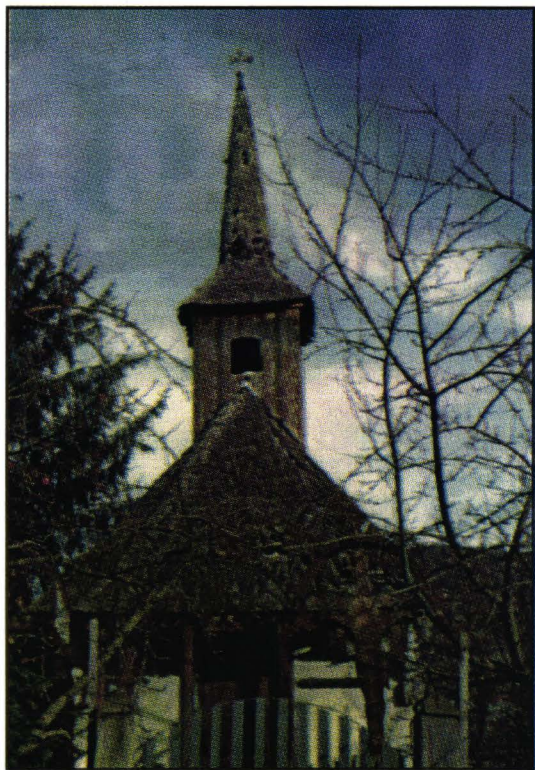


Fragment of sandstone, tombstone, with incised sign of the cross in the cemetery at Bidiu

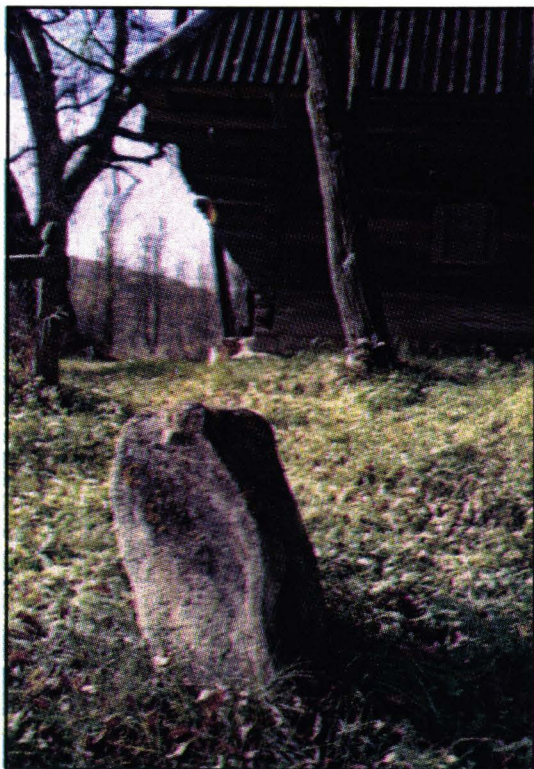


The "stone" cemetery at Bidiu





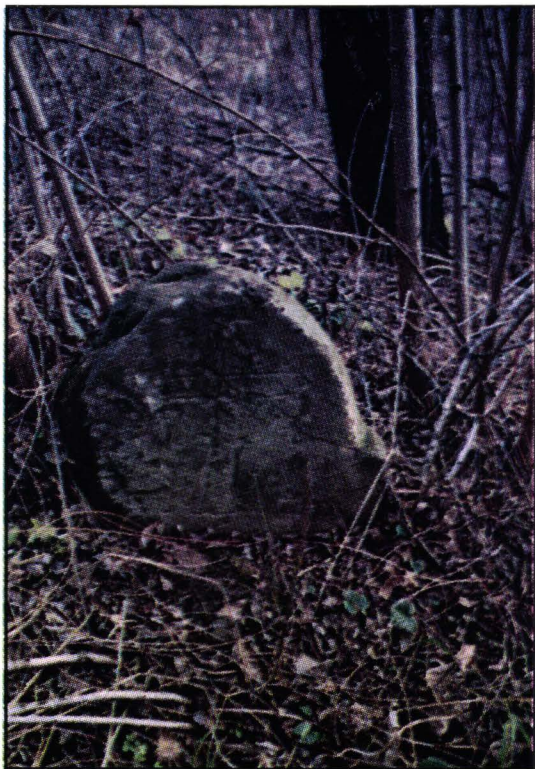
The wooden church at Sângeorzu Nou,  
November 2002



Sandstone concretion -  
tombstone by the  
wooden church at Apatiu

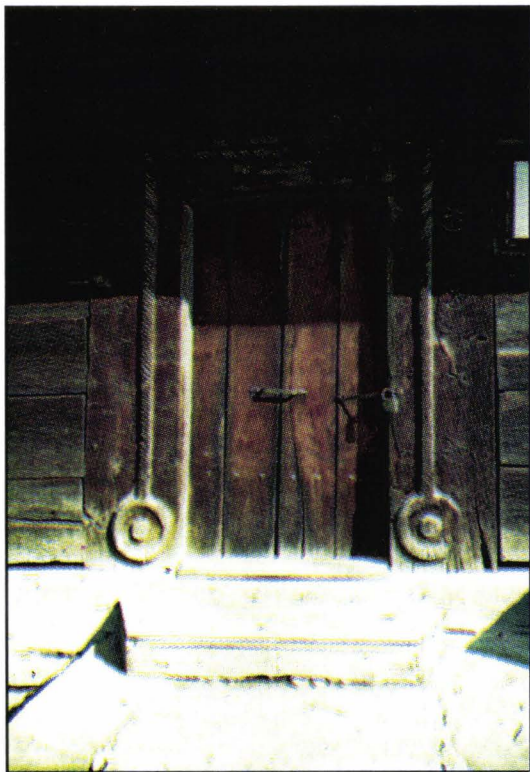


Sălcuța - the cemetery and the wooden church



Sandstone concretion - tombstone -  
in the cemetery at Sălcuța



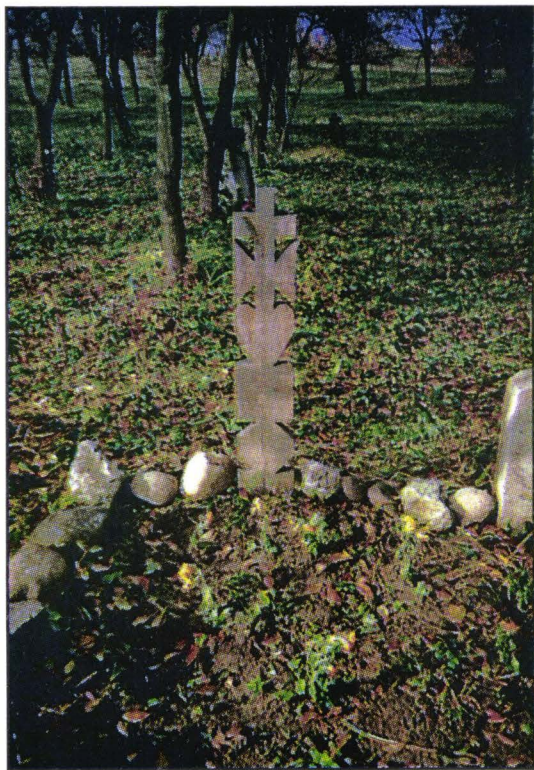


The ornaments on the doorframe of  
the entrance to the  
wooden church at Bungard



Old wooden crosses in the  
cemetery at Mărișelu





Wooden cross in the cemetery at  
Mărișelu



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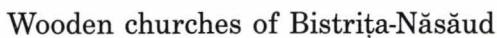
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